

Sermon on Romans 13:8-14 → “Ordinary Saints” September 3rd/4th, 2011

Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and the Lord Christ Jesus. Amen.

Today we find ourselves beginning in the middle of chapter 13 in Romans. The beginning part of this chapter addressed being a good citizen, an ordinary saint. For these Roman Christians it was being a good citizen in the Republic, living under the Roman Emperor. And at this time in history the emperor that was in office was Nero – one of the worst emperors the world has ever known. But Paul still encouraged these Roman Christians to do their civic duties – pay taxes, respect authority, honor those in public office. And those words are good for us to hear today too. We all know that whoever is president in this country will either be loved or loathed, but the expectation for Christians is to still be obedient members of society, doing what they can, being ordinary saints for the betterment of all.

Our passage that we heard from this chapter comes on the heels of that call to be good citizens. But the passage we just heard – to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be prepared, to clothe ourselves in Christ, also comes on the heels of chapter 12, a chapter which talked about our lives lived as Christians grounded in the mercies of God. As it says in another place in Scripture, we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).

So there are two things that we'll focus on from this passage. The first is love, the second is the daily importance of our baptism. And the reason I want to dwell there is because love is an often misunderstood word, and baptism is often a misunderstood sacrament. So our focus today will

primarily be on two verses – verse 10: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” – and verse 14: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Or if you want to think of it this way – this sermon will be about your lives as “ordinary saints” (so Luther) living in the world God came to redeem.

Love

Love is an often misunderstood word. When we think of love we think of what? Hearts, candy, roses and flowers, Shakespeare’s Rome and Juliet, Hollywood movies like Casablanca, Grease, Pretty in Pink, or a movie that I loved in high school, Can’t Hardly Wait. We see these movies, get all warm and fuzzy inside and think – why can’t real life be like that? Well, as we all know, real life isn’t like that – at least for very long. As we all know, especially those of you who are married or have been married know, love isn’t like that. The Bible teaches a far different kind of love than that. The love Scripture preaches to us about is all about sacrifice, self-giving, self-denial, loving those who don’t deserve it. One of the best places in Scripture that addresses this kind of love is in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 which says, “Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

And our passage for today reiterates that. Love is not based on emotions or feelings or even our own hearts. Love is based on God’s law. As Paul himself says, all the commandments can be summed up in this word – “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So if I were to ask you at any time (and if there are any confirmation students here you can do this too) – What are the 10

Commandments? You can answer: Love your neighbor as yourself. The place where we first find this teaching is way back in Leviticus 19. But there's a difference. In Leviticus 19 the call to love your neighbor as yourself was a call to love those who you knew – for the ancient Israelites your neighbor was a fellow Israelite. However, when Jesus or Paul talks about loving your neighbor, that love is to be directed not only towards those we know, but also towards those we don't know, and even to those who are our enemies – something that Republicans and Democrats should remember all the time during election campaigns. As Jesus himself says elsewhere (Luke 6:32), “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”

So love's proper place is not in our hearts, our emotions, or our feelings. Love's proper place belongs in our relationships with others, with those who we don't know, our enemies, those who may come along our path every day. So as you go to wherever God has called you to work and serve, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is how to be an “ordinary saint” – to love. For, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor.” I wish I could say more about love, but let this suffice for now.

Baptism

The second thing I wish to draw your attention too is the last passage in chapter 13 where Paul encourages us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul says this he means to draw our attention to our baptism. As the acolytes were taught last week, this robe, this alb that I and others wear every week is one way that we “put on our Lord Jesus Christ.” This garment is to remind all of you of your baptism as well. And the baptismal font is placed here to remind you that you enter the church through baptism. Because even though many of you were baptized

years ago, your baptism stays with you, the promise that you were given on that day always stays with you, the promise that you are God's now, that you've been forgiven, that death will not have final control over you, but God will. Baptism is something that only happens once, but it is not a one a done thing – and it is also not something we do but it is something that God does. For when I baptize someone it is not my promise I'm giving to them, but it is God's word, God's promise that is given to them. That's why when someone is baptized, especially a child, it is so important for all of us who promise to raise a child in the Faith to actually do what we promise them. Baptism isn't about doing something to make grandma and grandpa happy, baptism is about what God has done for us already in Jesus Christ, baptism is about what God is always doing everyday by forgiving us when we falter, and baptism is foretaste of what God will ultimately do with our lifeless and decomposing bodies in the grave – give us new life.

So when Paul encourages these Roman Christians to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” he is encouraging them to remember what God did to them in baptism – that God put their old selves to death so that the new creature, the new you can live and walk in newness of life (Rom. 6). And he does this because of one reason: Christians can get spiritually lazy, and we get a hint of that when Paul talked about living honorably with the “armor of light” – not reveling in drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy - but this is true everywhere, but perhaps even more so here in America, which includes Escanaba. You can be spiritually lazy, you can get complacent, you can live as if your baptism makes absolutely no difference in your daily life, you can live as if Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross makes little difference for you in how you live your life wherever God calls you to serve. And you can do that because your faith is a private thing after all right?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, faith is not a private thing. Faith is a very public thing. Jesus Christ died a very public death, walked around as our Resurrected Lord publicly, and ascended to heaven in the sight of hundreds of people. So because you have been baptized in the sight of many, God expects that you will live your life as a Christian honorably – as one of His ordinary saints.

May the Lord bless and guide each and every one of you “ordinary saints” as you love whatever neighbor that may cross your path this week, and may your baptism always remind what lengths God has gone to so that He can call you one of His ordinary saints.