

Sunday Worship Service 4_03_2022

Tue, 4/12 12:10PM 27:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, paul, people, greet, letter, christ, phoebe, names, jesus christ, lord, god, read, gospel, gathered, kinds, mentioned, hear, rufus, community, embrace

SPEAKERS

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00:06

We're going to take some time now to get into God's word a little more deeply together. So as I invite you to do each week, I hope that you will have a copy of scripture out and open in front of you, there are few Bibles available in front of you, the red ones there, if you need one of those, if you've got your own Bible or your Bible app, I would encourage you to have that out. And we will be in the book of Romans this morning in the New Testament. So after the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you'll find the book of Acts, and then the book of Romans. And we'll be right at the very end of that here this morning. And as you are turning there, I'd like to just once again, say thank you to all of our university students who helped to lead our worship services last Sunday for giving them their time to help prepare for that and plan for that, and particularly like to thank Martha for preaching, and both of the two morning services and Kailyn, for preaching at the evening one and just appreciate you leading us through that particular time. Today, we're gonna get back into this study that we've been doing the letter that Paul wrote to the Christians in the ancient city of Rome. And again, we'll be in the 16th chapter here getting very close to the end of this just one more week. So if you've been wondering, how long is this going to go on today? One more, we're done. We're almost there, we can do this. But as we look at this here today, it's a pretty interesting section. It reminded me that a few years ago, some years ago, after I first finished my seminary studies, I was looking for a church to go serve. And I accepted a call to serve as the pastor of this congregation, it was several states away from where we were living at that time. In fact, outside of the search committee that interviewed me, my wife, and I didn't know anybody there, we didn't know anybody, we weren't really sure exactly what we were stepping into. And as we were preparing for the move, one of the office staff mailed a copy of the most recent church photo directory, which was great, I thought, This is good. And then as I opened it up, there was a note, it said something to the effect of I hope this can get you can help you get to know your new church family a little bit. And then they had gone through. And next to most every picture, annotated it with who was related to whom and who lived next to whom and how long they'd been at the church and what kind of roles they had served in and leadership and volunteer ship and who made the best potluck casseroles, and all kinds of really helpful stuff. It was good. And we ended up being at that church for about six years. So I got to build personal relationships with everyone that was in there, which was its own wonderful thing. But that was a great way to just get a little glimpse into Who is this community. I bring that up, because the passage that we're going to look at here, near the end of the letter has something of that kind of a feel to it. Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome, he had not been there personally. And he is trying to

introduce them to some people they may have not known. He's trying to say hello to some people, he's doing some networking in a way in a way and introducing people to one another. He's giving a little portrait, a little glimpse of this is what the church looks like. And there's some really interesting stuff that we can glean from this section. I'm hoping to show you that to you this morning. But before we do, let's take another moment and pray. Great and gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have to be here together today. Lord quiet are distracted minds, calm or distraught hearts. Let us hear what you have to say to us. And then let us respond in ways that demonstrate our love for you and our love for others. And Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. As you may well know, at this point, the book of Romans is perhaps one of the most famous sections in all of Scripture and some of the verses that we find in Rome and some of even the phrases we find there are perhaps the most well known in the entire Bible as well. And yet, a lot of times when people are working through it or reading through it, and you get to this final chapter, you can be tempted to just skim through it or skip over it entirely. Paul begins to mention all these names and referred all these people and we don't know who all of them are. We're not sure what's going on here. It feels like maybe just reading one of those genealogies in the Old Testament or like scrolling through the LinkedIn page of someone you've never met before. You're not sure exactly what is happening in this section. What are some very interesting things again, I want to help us see what those are and some of the implications that they have for us. Right now still, before we do that, here's the passage. This is Romans chapter 16, verses one through 23. This again is the word of the Lord. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, servant of the church that can pray that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and help her in whatever she may need from you. She has been a patron of many and of myself as well. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epinephelus who was the first convert to Christ in Asia, Greek Mary, who's worked hard for you, Greta Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles and they were in Christ just before me, greet and play artists, my beloved in the Lord greet or Banis, our fellow worker in Christ and my beloved stake ease, greet appellees Who is approved in Christ, greet those who belong to the family there are a stimulus, greet my kinsmen. Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord's for faina and for fossa, greet the beloved person who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus chosen in the Lord also his mother who has been a mother to me as well. Greet a synchronous flag on Hermes, PETRONAS Hermus, and the brothers who are with them. Grateful Logan's jewel Julia and a Reyes and his sister and Olympus and all the saints who are with them greet one another, with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. I feel you, brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught, avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. And by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive for your obedience is known to all so that I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker greets you, so delicious and Jason and suscipit are my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is hosting me into the whole church greets you are Rastus, the city treasurer and our brother Cordis greet you. This passage is really building on everything that Paul had been getting up to at this particular point. And I want to again, help us to see why that's the case. Because if we just jump in right here, we may think this doesn't have anything to do with me. I don't know any of these people are I don't even know how to pronounce those names. What's going on here. This is a build up that Paul has been getting to the whole letter, as you hope know by now is about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's about who we are in Jesus Christ individually, and then what that means for us. When we are together, this letter has the most sustained presentation of the gospel anywhere in Scripture. And the gospel has a lot to say about our deepest and truest place of belonging. There is a longing for belonging that even the

hermit's among us have, you want to have a place where you are known, and where you know others a place where you are loved and safe and welcomed. It's a common impulse behind gathering his family or friends. It's why we have clubs and organizations and social media groups and teams. And then we proclaim we display are longing through T shirts, or brands or logos and hashtags, membership dues, or ID cards we have inside jokes and shared histories. And we create these boundary markers then although we end up constricting them until they become smaller and smaller and end up keeping people out rather than bringing people in. And yet we have this wandering, we have this question of is there a place that we belong? What does belonging look like in this world. And it's too often that we slowly and painfully recognize that it can't be met by any of the places we typically look. There's something deeper, truer that we need. And the Gospel speaks a word of comfort that is different than anything else that we hear. Because the gospel has in it. This good news that we do belong is not to ourselves, but to Jesus Christ. And that means something for us individually, and also together. It's a theme that Paul has brought up a lot in this letter back in chapter six in particular is where he begins to talk about our identity with Jesus Christ, the union that we have with Him through faith, chapter eight, he talks all about this idea of what it means to really find our identity in Jesus Christ as individuals. And then beginning in chapter 12, he moves on to say, this is what it means now for you together as God's people because it's not just about you as an individual, it's about you having a place in God's story. You are brought into this relationship with God, by the Father through the Son and the power of the Spirit, you're brought into something much larger than yourself. And the gospel shows us what that looks like. That the father out of unconditional and freely given grace calls us to himself at the sun, through His merciful and sacrificial love claims us as His own that the Spirit then in truth and in in power applies those things to us making us new individually and also together. So Paul has been he spent a lot of time on all of these ideas throughout the letter. Hopefully you've seen some of them. If you haven't been with us or you don't know the letter, go back and read it. You'll see that and what do we find then, is a little portrait of that here right at the end. Paul is giving you a little glimpse into this what this looks like he's showing us what God's people look like. And he's talking here about one point he uses the phrase all the Saints he uses that phrase all the saints and in the New Testament when you read the word saint, it's now referring to somebody who's leveled up and is on a higher spiritual plane than you are it's it's not that same as just a way to refer to somebody who is a believer in Jesus Christ. He's simply saying this is this is the church. This is a little portrait of the church, I'm giving you a glimpse here. And there are a lot of names in here. We don't know everything about all of them. We know some things about a few of them. I'm going to say that but this is the lengthiest conclusion like this, that we find it a lot of the end of the letters, you see a couple little greetings, maybe one or two names are mentioned. This is the longest one we see anywhere in Scripture. It's also one of the longer examples we have in just ancient literature in general, Paul lists 35 different individuals. In this section, he mentions two families, you mentioned three churches. And interestingly, he the word church, the Greek word Ecclesia. This is the first time that ever shows up in this letter, when he's talking about these gathered groups of people in here, he also mentioned nine women by name, that would have been incredibly unusual in an ancient letter like that, and seven of them, he specifically commends and praises for their work, and what they've done for the church. That's a real significant thing. I'll come back to that also in just a moment. But as you read through this section, it may not stick out to us because we don't recognize much of what's going on here. But simply by hearing the name simply by reading the names and seeing what they are, in his audience would have recognized the church in Rome would have known immediately there's a breadth and diversity here to the people of God. There's a lot of different cultural names there. Some are coming from Jewish backgrounds, Gentile backgrounds, Roman backgrounds, Greek backgrounds, there's a lot of different socio economic standings and classes that are represented here. And Paul doesn't separate them out into different categories. He just brings them all together and says, This is what it looks like. And he describes it here, at least in brief passing. Here's a comment that comes from a 16th century German theologian, a pastor named Tillman Hess, who's he said this in his commentary on this book. He said, Therefore,

when we seek the church, we should not look for the courts of mighty leaders, for powerful renowned people for spacious empires. Instead, we should seek a community that embraces the teachings of the apostles, and submits to the preaching of the faith, which Paul describes here, in this passage. He's just given a little snapshot here. And being a part of this is being a commodity community that reaches out and welcomes in. I'll say more more about that in just a moment. But again, I want to point out a couple of things to you. Because there's some very interesting stuff here. We don't know everything about all these people. Some of the names we don't really know anything at all about perhaps someday when we all sit around Christ table together, we can get to know these people a lot better. I look forward to that. That should be a fun kind of thing to do. But here's what we do know about a few of them. So let me point out a couple things. The first person you mentioned is Phoebe. Phoebe was someone that we see elsewhere in Scripture. She was a wealthy individual, she had a pretty high social standing, which likely means that she was a pretty well educated person in that time. She had spent a lot of time with Paul, they had a good close relationship. A couple of things here he mentioned in the very in the translation that I read, he calls her a servant of the church, you may see a footnote in your Bible. It says it is Deacon the word there the actual literal word used is Deacon. And in all of Paul's other writings, when he uses that he's almost always referring to the technical office in the church of Deacon. So it's quite likely he is referring to her as a deacon in the church. If he's not, then at least she's commending her for her service. Here's something else that's kind of interesting. I found. It was pretty common practice in that day for the person who delivered a letter somewhere to be the one then to present that to the recipient. Phoebe was the one who carry this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome, she was with him. When he was in Corinth, she was wanting to carry this letter there. So in all likelihood, she was the one who first read this letter to the Christians who were there. Now Phoebe had spent a lot of time with Paul, they probably had some questions when they first heard this letter, they would have asked her she would have been able to answer some of those things. So he can't prove this, but it is very, very reasonable to consider Phoebe, the first person to preach and expound upon the book of Romans. I would love to hear what she has to say about that. Something really interesting He commends her there right at the beginning. Then he mentioned two different couples. We know something about them Priscilla and Aquila, read the book of Acts. The name is spelled Priscilla, same person, just a different spelling. They were another very significant couple in Paul's life. He had lived with them. While he was in the city of Corinth. They had worked together they had worked a shared trade together, they hosted a congregation of believers in their house. He mentioned and Ronica and Juniata is another husband and wife ministry team. You may see another footnote, the translation I read says that they are well known to the apostles, you may see a footnote saying it could be read. They're well known among the apostles. There's some debate there. I think that other translation is more likely. The implication perhaps being that Jr was among those who were considered some of the apostolic leadership in the early church again, it's just an input perhaps a potential implication from some of that, but He commends them he thanks them for their service. You mentioned the guy named Narcissus we hear that that's usually not a good name to have. We hear that one we Do you don't think that's a particularly good name to have? The early church fathers all the earliest church fathers and writers all agree that this was referring to a very well known individual in the city of Rome at that time who had been a slave of the Emperor Claudius. And when he was a slave of the Emperor Claudius, he was involved in some very shady governmental dealings some real desert, a lot of corruption there on behalf of the government is really involved in some messed up stuff. However, he came to know Jesus, he became a believer, his life got entirely transformed, entirely changed around and then when Nero came into power as emperor, he had him killed because of that. So this guy had a really fascinating story is very likely almost certain that's who it is. You mentioned somebody named Rufus. If you're familiar with the Gospel account in Mark chapter 15, Jesus is carrying His cross on his way to be executed and a man named Simon of Cyrene is told to carry it for him. Simon comes down carries his cross and we're told there that he had a son named Rufus. This is almost probably certainly him as well. So this is somebody whose dad may be carried Jesus cross part of the way for him on his way

to his crucifixion. He says, talk to Rufus. Also his mom is wonderful. There's some real personal relationships here. You mentioned Timothy a little later on, we know Timothy very well, you read the New Testament, Paul wrote two letters to him. He was his protegee. He was a leader in the early church. And then if you're paying attention, verse 22, might have surprised you when it says, I Tertius who wrote this letter, and you're thinking, I thought Paul wrote the letter that's we've been saying, for the last, however months we've been in this is a very common practice in the ancient world, for somebody to use a scribe, they were called into menu ANSYS, it was simply you would dictate the letter, and they would write it down for you. That's, that's all that is there. So Tertius is the one who was writing down a Paul said, and he took a moment to just add his own little greeting in there. So say I'm, I'm also saying hello. So these are some of the names in here. Again, we don't know much about some of the rest of them. But even in those ones, the reason I shared some of those ones, is I hope, in that you heard and saw and just maybe gotten a little glimpse of the fact that you had all kinds of generations represented. You had all kinds of economic status represented somebody who used to be enslaved, and those who are wealthy homeowners and business people. You had people who were coming from ethnically and culturally and religiously Jewish backgrounds, and some who were Gentile backgrounds. You had singles, you had couples, you had men, you had women, there's a breadth to the demographics of the people of God that Paul was describing it, it's not accidental. And that's something that we're meant to see. It's something we see elsewhere in Scripture, all kinds of places, we get this little reminder, even when Dwight was reading just a little bit ago in Exodus chapter 12. That's where God is setting his people free from their bondage in Egypt, he's about to pass them through the waters of the Red Sea and off onto the land of promise. And it said it was a mixed multitude that went up, said all kinds of people, nation of Israel, first and foremost, but all kinds of people gotten brought up out of this, and sent them into something new. So what we see very famously, in Revelation, chapter seven, John has a vision of people from every tribe, and language and nation gathered before the throne of Jesus Christ. So in this breath, and in this scope that we find are the people of God, there is a shared point of connection now. That's their faith in Jesus Christ and their willingness to follow his calling, and to participate in the kind of transforming and renewing work of the Holy Spirit while still remaining who they were. This is a really interesting thing also to remember, when you look at the second half of the second part of Romans and other parts of Scripture, on one hand, and we talking about having a new identity in Jesus Christ, it doesn't mean that the things that make you who you are just disappear, and you just become a kind of faceless number, it doesn't mean that at all. On the other hand, to say that we have an identity and Jesus Christ doesn't mean that God just gives a stamp of approval to every single thing about who we are and what we do our behaviors and our practices right now. But every single one of us is remade in the image of Jesus Christ. Every single one of us has reformed as God's people, the things that make us who we are, are still there, and that we're also radically new. It's a kind of a portrait that Paul is giving here right now. Now, that kind of relationship in a community is not an easy thing to always maintain. It's not always easy thing to uphold. It has to be done intentionally, and with vigilance. That's why right in the midst of that, right in the midst of this little snapshot, Paul also says, Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. They why why Paul, did you have to slip that warning in here right in the middle? Because he knows the kinds of things that people do when they're together. He knows the kinds of things that we are susceptible to when we are together. It is easy to give way to those who cause divisions and create obstacles. It's an easy thing to do Paul saying watch out for that. Those things can pop up easier than you know. Watch out for them. So How do you? How do you do that? How do you cultivate this kind of a community? He's presenting a portrait of the believing people of God, those who believe in Jesus Christ and He has gathered to himself and he's remaking an image of in his own image through the work of His Spirit. How do you cultivate that kind of stuff? Paul mentions two things here. They're pretty simple. I'm not gonna try to overcomplicate this. On one hand, he says there's things to avoid. On the other hand, he says there's things to embrace, things to avoid things to embrace. Right at the end of verse 17, is when he says avoid them. You say, well avoid who the beginning of

that sentence is when he says, Watch out for those who cause divisions, and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. The doctrine that you have been taught. The main theme of this entire letter is how it is that God redeems sinners through the work of Jesus Christ. And then a repeated emphasis all through the letter is how God brings people together, Jew and Gentile alike to live out that new life in Christ. So Paul is saying, watch out for those who reject those things. Watch out for those who reject this claim that Jesus Christ is Lord, the same Lord as Lord of all is verse 10, says bestowing his riches on all who call on him. Watch out for those who reject the belief that is chapter 12 says, We who are many are one body in Christ. Watch out as chapter 14 talks about for those who seek to cause divisions over secondary matters, because Paul says, Those who do that are not serving the Lord Christ. They're pursuing their own appetites. They're going after the things that make them happy. And Paul says that's not from God, which is why he says, The God of peace will soon crush Satan. So he says, avoid those things. Don't give way to them. It's easy for those things to pop up. Those things pop up all the time. Watch out for them. We avoid them. Hey, this, this is part of it. This is part of it. This is a part of God's people gathered together. It's a beautiful, wonderful part of it. Avoid the things he says it cause division, create obstacles, and then embrace one another. He says, Be intentional about embracing one another. You probably noticed this when I was reading you I've seen it 17 times in this section Paul says greet one another 17 times in this section says greet one another. Now that sounds like a nightmare. To the introverts. I know that 17 times he says greet one another once he says greet one another with a holy kiss. And that sounds like a nightmare to the epidemiologists. I know that, right? It's not a romantic gesture there. It's just a cultural sign of greeting a lot of cultural still do this little kiss on the cheek, it's kind of what he's getting out there. But in that the sense of the word that he's using, the sense that he's getting is embrace and welcome one another, if not physically, at least emotionally, and socially. Now this calling to embrace one another for first and foremost, as we're looking at this, first and foremost is calling to embrace one another is one that he's giving to those who are your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Yes, that's what he's talking about here. It's why in verse two, and he's talking about Phoebe, he says, Welcome her in a way that's worthy of the saints that is our first and foremost calling. But it also does go beyond that. It also goes further than that, we know that because scripture talks about it. And so does Jesus the call to embrace others reaching means reaching out to those who are in need means caring for those around you mean sharing the good news of Jesus and showing the love of Jesus to those who have not encountered those things before means being willing to invest in others, it means it means at an absolute bare minimum, to see one another as created in the image of God. But it goes beyond that to mean that we ought to care for one another in ways that are willing to give of ourselves to do so because in verse 19, he says, that is what is good, be wise as to what is good. That's what he's talking about, be wise, as to what is good. We actually have a great opportunity to bear witness to these things here in the next couple of parts of our service. As we're celebrating baptism in just a moment than the Lord's Supper. These are the signs and seals of the Covenant communities are the things that display and then confirm this identity that we have in Christ as well as the relationship we have to one another in Christ. And these are the things to which the Church has always been committed, and by which the Church has always been defined. You think of at the end of Acts, chapter two, it says that there are believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers, those are the things around which we gather the things by which we are defined the things to which we are committed, it's not about just producing the sleekest product that you can put out there for consumption. But it's about a gathering around the word of the Lord hearing what it is that Jesus has to say, being nourished by Him at His table being strengthened by Him by His Spirit, and then going out in his name into his world. Two years ago, I think we all know that during the first kind of disorienting stage of the pandemic, the impulse that a lot of people had was to was to acknowledge that we were sharing something there, there was a commonality to it. So the phrase that popped up everywhere was we're in this together, but that sentiment didn't last very long. Long, we began to realize that not everybody was experiencing or interpreting it in the same way. And as the year progressed along that initial

impulse to solidarity it collapsed as there were debates around racial justice or politics, or how do you balance personal freedoms with communal responsibility and the fault lines that they exposed soon gave way to chasms? And we just saw something that we didn't even really like about ourselves necessarily. So how does the church show something different? How can the church display something different? We have to start by reaffirming that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but that God demonstrates His love to us and that while we were still sinning Christ died for us, we'd have to go on to remember that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone, not through any of our efforts or initiatives, we'd have to intentionally locate our identity in Jesus Christ, we'd have to deliberately reach out to others in his name, and for his sake, we'd have to watch out for those who cause divisions, we'd have to embrace one another in ways that enable us to reflect this kind of community. That's what Paul's describing here. Next time you read through this letter, and you should read through this letter often next time you read through this letter, don't close up shop when you get to this final section, because if you don't think it has anything to say, take time. And just imagine what a community like that would actually look like. Imagine some of the conversations and discussions and disagreements that they probably had with one another, what would that look like? Some of the challenges that they would have faced and yet the commitment that they had to live out their new life in Christ together and then ask yourself, What's that look like in my life? Be wise to what is good. Paul says here, and in doing so we can bear witness to Christ and His Kingdom. Let's pray together. Great and gracious God we give you praise for how you have chosen us in Christ for how you have called us by name for how you have brought us into your Kingdom Lord, enable us to reach out to those around us, to point them to Jesus Christ. To see lives transformed as a result and then to bear witness to your gospel in the midst of the world around us for it's in Jesus name we pray, Amen.