

An HGTV Makeover
Romans 12:9-21
August 28, 2011

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This is the second time I have had the privilege of preaching, and for those of you keeping score, it is the second time I am preaching from a Pauline letter; in fact the second time I am preaching from the book of Romans. I can't say that this is completely on purpose because I decided to follow the lectionary and after considering the other texts this is where I felt the Spirit leading; but I do think, at least subconsciously, that I am drawn to preach from the Pauline epistles.

I should clarify. You see there was a time in my life when I felt more at home with a Pauline epistle. He is pretty black and white. He often pontificates on how things are either good or bad, Godly or ungodly, saved or damned. While this was helpful for me in fastidiously working out my own salvation, eventually I took my eyes off myself and realized what these words were doing and had done to other people.

I think the words of Howard Thurman (a well respected African American theologian) describe this problem aptly. He says this in his book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*: "During much of my boyhood I was cared for by my grandmother, who was born a slave and lived until the Civil War on a plantation near Madison, Florida. My regular chore was to do all the reading for my grandmother-she could neither read nor write. Two or three times a week I read the Bible aloud to her. I was deeply impressed by the fact that she was most particular about the choice of Scripture. For

instance, I might read many of the more devotional Psalms, some of Isaiah, the Gospels again and again. But the Pauline epistles, never-except at long intervals, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. My curiosity knew no bounds, but we did not question her about anything.

When I was older and was half through college, I chanced to be spending a few days at home near the end of summer vacation. With a feeling of great temerity I asked her one day why it was that she would not let me read any of the Pauline letters. What she told me I shall never forget: 'During the days of Slavery,' she said, 'the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Old man McGhee was so mean that he would not let a Negro minister preach to his slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as a text "Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters...., as unto Christ.'" Then he would go on to show how it was God's will that we were slaves and how, if we were happy and good slaves God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible.'"

Although I understand these sentiments, I must chide myself for walking away from Paul for so long. Although not reading parts of the Bible is an option, just like Thomas Jefferson's decision to edit his own Bible, walking away does not negate the fact that Paul is an important figure in our Christian faith; in fact, walking away from Paul only leaves him and his thoughts to those who may agree with some of his more problematic proclamations (e.g. subordinating women to men, telling slaves to be obedient, or claiming that homosexuality is an abomination, etc.).

To some degree, I feel a responsibility to understand Paul better because I do not believe that our faith is sexist, racist, or homophobic. I think that these statements were meant to be interpreted through something and not to be taken by themselves as a primary way of interpreting the rest of the New Testament. I believe that there is something good and beautiful and true to the gospel that calls all people to discover the God that has been working intimately with and in the world through God's people since the beginning of time. God's working has been about bringing life and hope, peace and truth to people that are made in his image.

As we listen to Paul's words today, may we listen with open ears and hearts, attempting to discern what the Spirit of the living God has to say to us today in our own lives and in the life of our community...

Romans 12:9-21

Perhaps it is just my age and circumstance, but I think a lot about home these days. It is probably because just about any time that Lexi and I have off from work is usually devoted to maintaining or updating our house. Or, the fact that our evening television time is perpetually filled with shows like *Holmes on Homes*, *Devine Design*, *Yard Crashers*, or any of the other home improvement shows. Or maybe it is because I, like many people today in their 20's and 30's, haven't resided in a single place for more than a year since I was in college; that is until this year. Author and Pastor, Carol Howard Merritt speaks to this issue in her book *The Tribal Church*:

Ministering to the Missing Generation when she shares about her own nomadic story of moving from place to place for over 15 years. Whatever the reason, when I hear our Scripture passage today, all I can think about is Paul's desire for Christians to create a house of faith for people that would make Candice Olsen, Mike Holmes, and Ahmed Hassan envious.

For a lot of people the Christian faith doesn't feel so homey.

If we are going to remake house of faith we are going to have to remember what home looks like. Where are the places, who are the people, and what are the things that make home for you? As was mentioned this was our Facebook question of the week. Robin Spurling said it was the hospitality her new church in Carthage, IL showed her. For Rene is has been the people along the way, who have cared for her.

The other day, Bruce Newton invited me to a runners group that meets at Millard West every Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. Each week we work out on the track and afterwards the group goes out for a beer, and I must say that running around that track and interacting with the group made me feel at home. Dr. Bill, who is an avid member of this runners group, told me last week, it feels like church.

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to my guitar teacher about faith and he said he finds church at his shop when he is strumming his guitar with friends or students.

What about you?

Is it as our Faith Point song said, pumpkin pie, chocolate candy,
Jesus Christ or in eyes of a loved one?

What is home for you?

What makes home such a special place?

How do we know when we've found home?

Will we create such a place?

Perhaps we can look to Paul and his instructions on how to relate to those within the community and those outside of the community. Listen to his list again:

A place where love is genuine, where people are holding fast to good and hating evil, outdoing one another in showing honor, where we do not lag in zeal, where we are ardent in the Spirit, and serve the Lord. A place where we rejoice in hope, are patient in suffering, persevering in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, and extending hospitality to strangers.

A place where we bless those who persecute us instead of cursing, where we rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, living in harmony with one another, not being haughty, associating with the lowly, where we don't claim to be wiser than we are, Don't repay evil for evil, but leave room for the wrath of God.

Renowned scholars, Dominic Crosson and Marcus Borg, on a book they wrote together on Paul, entitled *The First Paul*, say that there may be no more divisive person in the Christian faith than Paul. Most, who have read his letters, either find him appalling or appealing.