

“Love One Another”

Romans 13:8-14

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Introduction: The book of Romans is a letter the Apostle Paul sometime around 55 to 60 when conditions were so bad for Christians living in Rome that they had to worshiped in secret and risked their lives by naming Jesus rather than the Emperor as Lord. Paul wrote in anticipation of going to see them as part of his missionary travels.

The letter Paul begins with one long sentence defining his calling and declaring that they too are called to belong to Jesus Christ as God’s Beloved people. This is followed by 11 chapters in which he lays out in detail the purpose, power and promise of Gods salvation work for all of God’s Beloved. Chapter 12 marks a significant shift from reminders of what God has done in Jesus Christ to offering his best advice, his words of encouragement addressed specifically for the followers of Jesus in Rome. Our text today gets to the heart of Paul’s appeal to them as brothers and sisters.

Text: Romans 13:8-14 ⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off^[a] the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us walk decently as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in illicit sex and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Love one another. That is it. That sums up Paul’s advice for the followers of Jesus facing all sorts of anger, hatred, exclusion, suffering, and persecution, because of the power of the mighty Roman Empire over their lives. Think about that.

Does that sound like something, that in any way can be thought of as easy to do. On the surface out of context, it does sound good. There is an obvious goodness in Paul’s advice to “love one another.” Loving one another is good, when it happens.

Two people fall in love and boom it’s a whole new world. Everything looks better. Life itself seems to blossom with new energy, new joy, wonderful hopes and expectations. That was

certainly the case when I met the woman I married. Feeling loved, being in love, loving one another like that, or being one in a group of lifetime friends, is a real blessing. Isn't that the way life should be? It fits so well with childhood fairytales that end with "and they lived happily ever after."

I think we all know, however, that real life is far more complicated, and our relationships even with those most precious include plenty of times when "love one another" is just not happening. Among my earliest memories there are a multitude of occasions when I had been squabbling with my sister until one of us was physically hurt. Then my mother intervened, reminding us that we both knew better and then forcing us to say we were sorry and to kiss and make up. It was a rare occasion, when either one of us walked away "feeling the love."

So, was Paul making a similar appeal? Knowing the situation in Rome and knowing how wonderful life-giving love can be, was Paul simply urging them to try a little harder to get along, to love one another?

The question becomes more intriguing when you realize just who Paul is saying they should love. The other, included family and friends and everyone else. So, was Paul telling them to love even the very people who were persecuting them just as they loved themselves?

Yes. Absolutely. This is the good news that did encourage Christians in Rome. They did in fact persist in loving even their enemies as they loved themselves, even to the point of martyrdom. They did so because of what Paul affirms for all Christians right from the first verse in this text, his summons to: "love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

This love of which Paul speaks is love that fulfills the law, the rules of conduct for relationships with one another. Paul was writing about the very thing that fulfills, achieves, accomplishes the will of God. It is the love to which all of God's commandments point. Loving one another is the means by which God works to accomplish God's purpose for all of creation.

The good news for us in that we may love in this way because it is God's command. God gives us this love, through the grace of Jesus Christ. The Greek word Paul uses is *Agape*. *Agape* is rarely found anywhere other than in ancient Biblical texts. It is used exclusively for the love of God given for us through Jesus Christ. Such love may stir our affections and produce new energy, new joy, wonderful hopes and expectations, but the core meaning of *Agape* is to do good for others.

Agape is doing God's will. It is doing good. It is seeking what is good for another because of what God has given to us. It is in doing with and for others what is good for them regardless of how much it costs or how we may feel that the purpose, power and promise of God's love comes alive.

Paul wrote everything he wrote, he endured all the hardships he endured, he stood up against the life oppressing powers of his day seeking the good will of all, because he had experienced God's *Agape* when a man named Ananias (Acts 9:17) touched him, called him brother and he was suddenly transformed from being the persecutor of Christians to becoming the ambassador of God's Good news in Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

Your good deeds, your care for those in need here in St. Helens, the hungry, the homeless, the lost, and the least done as brothers and sisters in Christ may not ever seem to have such profound results as what happened to Paul. But then again, who knows what God may do. There just might be some wonderful surprises.

A number of years ago I was one of a dozen or so people from Covenant Pres. Gresham who were exposed to God's *Agape* love when we visited our sister Church in Camajauni Cuba. From the moment we first arrived with God's love pouring out of them for us. We had gone there to encourage them, but we received so much than we gave.

We stayed in an old campground where we had two cinderblock bunkbeds to sleep on. On the first night after most of us had finally fallen asleep, we were all awakened by some whispers and the light of one tiny flashlight. Someone found the light switch and we watched as a man named Jesus, who had greeted us when we first arrived, stretched out a mosquito net over the sleeping bag of the teenage boy who had forgotten to bring the mosquito net his mother had bought him for the trip.

Mosquito nets were essential to keep from being eaten alive in the steamy hot and sticky night. In the middle of the night, we watched. Jesus was beaming with joy as he carefully fitted the net to the bed frame and then he left, and we all went back to sleep.

It was not until the next morning after our long drive to Camajauni over jungle roads from the camp that we realized the significance of that gift from Jesus. He had gone back to Camajauni with the other church members who greeted us the night before. But when he got to his own bed he removed his own mosquito net, and then walked alone all the way back to the camp to help us out, and then walked all the way back home. The trip must have taken a couple of hours or more. There were no lights along those jungle roads. It was all because of God's love known and expressed in doing good for one another.

God's *agape* love was as real as the heat and humidity with our new brothers and sisters in Camajauni. I believe the blessings we received were every bit as transformative and life giving as those Paul found when he encountered that same love, as the man named Ananias reached out to touch him and called him brother.

Paul concluded his thoughts in today's text by calling the people to wake up, and get on with the doings of God's love or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases his words in the Message:

Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

Let us love one another in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit for the Glory of God. Amen.