

Romans 3: 9-12, 21-24

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08.08.21

Song or Prayer of Illumination

Alleluia, alleluia, Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia!

Today is our fourth Sunday of meditating on Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

The Roman Church was not homogenous, instead Paul wanted to address the blessings and challenges that came with their church's diversity. The Roman Church includes those who were born and raised Jewish and now follow Jesus, as well as those who are NOT Jewish. Paul refers to this second group as Greeks.

After writing to the Roman Church about how the Jewish law impacts their identity, Paul writes this passage to address what everyone in their congregation has in common:

Scripture: Romans 3:9-12, 21-24 CEB

This is the word of God for the beloved children of God / thanks be to God

PART 1

The Roman Church was blessed by the gift of diversity: Jewish and Greek people were worshipping together. But this also presented questions: were the Jewish community members already "good to go" because of their Jewish ancestors? When Paul, a Jewish man, begins this passage by asking "Are we Jewish people better off?" he's asking if their family connections can get them one step ahead.

Paul describes that the Old Testament, including the ten commandments, the books of the law, and the prophets all teach the Jewish people how to live in a way that loves God and their neighbors. But even though the law helps them to be aware of how they can serve God and live without sin, it's making them aware of the sins that they *are* committing. Paul sees the Jewish people as those who are aware of all that they should be doing, but it doesn't mean they're able to follow through perfectly.

What's more, Paul, a Jewish man, quotes the Psalms to remind them that their scriptures never said that being Jewish meant they were already "good to go" on all this sin and righteousness stuff: *As it is written: There is no righteous person, not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who looks for God. They all turned away. They have become*

worthless together. There is no one who shows kindness. There is not even one.

Keeping the law might make a person a member of the covenant people. It might make them a good citizen. But their ancestors Abraham and Sarah can't free the Jewish church members from the weight of sin. Sin still holds power over these church members.

On the other hand, Paul sees the Greek church members as those who don't have the background knowledge about the God who delivered Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah. They didn't have the Jewish law and the Jewish prophets to guide them.

Whether the church member was Jewish or Greek, being a member of their identity group wasn't enough to free them from the power of sin.

PART 2

The Greek and Jewish church members are struggling under the same power: the power of sin.

Sin shows off its power in many ways:

Sometimes we are very clear about how our actions hurt others and ourselves. We know very well how we have separated ourselves from others and attempted to isolate ourselves from God.

Sometimes our connection to sin is more complicated. We are part of systems that are broken, so we are partially responsible, but we're not the only ones responsible for addressing the sins in our society.

Sometimes our sin is not what we have done. Instead, we have sinned through what we have left unfinished. We fail to act when our support could have helped someone else. We don't love each other, or we try to help and we end up hurting someone.

Sometimes we know that we're sinning out of anger, or bitterness, or jealousy, or selfishness. But sometimes we sin without realizing that we're acting from our wounds. Even when we try to love, it ends up harming someone.

We can't perfect our actions so that we don't sin. Even when we have the best of intentions, sin still creeps up.

Whether our sins are individual or societal, whether they're the actions we've done or the actions we've left undone, Paul sees all people, both Jews and Greeks, as people who struggle

with sin, but can't shake it off. Sin has a power that is bigger than our sheer willpower, or our good intentions. Sin is too big and runs too deep for us to handle all on our own.

PART 3:

And this powerful sin can wreak havoc, whether that destruction is slow over many years or turns our world upside down in an instant. It creates all sorts of messes:

Societal sin leads some communities to face hunger while others struggle with food waste.

The sin of racism in our country is killing our siblings who are black, brown, and people of color.

The sin of sexism leads us to question the experiences and abilities of women.

Generational sin passes down anger, bitterness, and rage from parent to child.

Our individual sins erode trust, hurt our neighbors, and destroy our relationships with the people we love.

Of course, some sins are unintentional, but this doesn't mean that we aren't responsible for the consequences of our actions. As a Christian community, we hold each other accountable for the ways that our sins impact our relationship with God, with each other, and with our own souls.

PART 4:

Here at Triune, every week we gather around our baptismal font. We confess our sins, and then we continue to worship God. But before we get back to singing, we turn to Jesus for help. Today, Pastor Jennifer led our call to confession, and then she spoke these words over all of us: "Believe the Good News: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!"

Every Sunday here at Triune, we come to the baptismal font to confess that we are not in control, and that we need Jesus' help. Instead of trying to make ourselves perfect, or sweep our sin under the rug, we admit these words of Paul: "All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by God's gift of grace, given through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

- In Jesus, we find the power that is stronger than sin.
- In Jesus, we find the one who creates when we destroy.
- In Jesus, we find the one who is loving when we are harmful.
- In Jesus, we find all that is right when we are surrounded by all that feels so wrong.

We turn to Jesus, who has the power to redeem us and bring about God's righteousness.

- We don't have to live in shame because of our sin.
- We don't have to pretend we're perfect, shiny people.
- We don't have to give up hope for ourselves and for our world.

Instead, we simply have to accept that we can't experience healing, and community, and justice on our own. We need God's help, and that's why we praise God for the gift of Jesus.

Like our ancestors in the Roman Church, we celebrate the way that God shows up in all of our lives. We pray that Jesus would teach us how sinners can sit side by side as siblings, and sisters, and brothers. We pray that the Spirit would redeem all that is wounded by sin.

My friends and my neighbors, May we welcome Jesus' gift of grace and redemption for each one of our sins.

May it be so.