

August 7, 2011

Rev. Gloria Sannermark

Get Up and Go!

Romans 10: 1-4, 14-15.

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire is for Israel's salvation. That is my prayer to God for them.

I can vouch for them: they are enthusiastic about God. However, it (their enthusiasm) isn't informed by knowledge. They don't submit to God's righteousness because they don't understand his righteousness, and they try to establish their own righteousness. Christ is the goal of the Law which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God.

So how can they call on someone they don't have faith in?

And how can they have faith in someone they have not heard of?

And how can they hear without a preacher?

And how can they preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: Lord, may your spirit speak to us through humble words offered and the meditations of our hearts, so that we will be moved to serve you better.

Amen

Get Up And Go!

Well, did you see it? Did any of you ...or your neighbors ...notice the sign out front?
We did not plan it that way but it reads:

Faith Presbyterian Church

WORSHIP 10 A.M.

Get Up and Go!

I walk by the church most mornings and I've been smiling since I first saw those words. Without intending it, the title of this sermon seems to reach out to us on several levels. This is communion Sunday and my message is about a great God who was faithful to his people. It is also about us and how we are called to be faithful to God.

We began this morning with the intriguing story of Jacob and his favorite and youngest son Joseph. When sent on an errand to his brothers, Joseph failed to return. His devious siblings lied and told Jacob that Joseph was dead. We all love a mystery and this one goes on for quite a long time, but to fully appreciate what these men did, we have to realize the consequences of the sinfulness of their actions. What they did had the potential to change history and sever the tribe of Benjamin from God forever. But remember? The Bible is a story about God, and we are told that God counted Jacob as righteous because of his great faith. God ultimately fulfilled his promises and restored the family of Jacob as his own.

The greatest desire of God's heart is to bring his family home to himself; to redeem them and restore the relationship between him and all he has created. Before us this morning is the table of our Lord. It speaks of God's grace and faithfulness to us in the carpenter-man Jesus who became our redeeming Christ. This table also makes a statement of our faith. When we receive these elements of bread and wine, we testify to the understanding that regardless where we have been, what we have done or not done, or whom we have hurt along the way, Christ sacrificed himself so that our sins would be forgiven. Like Jacob, we are made right with God by our faith.

We are restored to a right relationship with God by our faith...but the Apostle Paul's letter this morning emphasizes that this table is not just for us. God's forgiveness is for all who would come and receive.

We need to know the history behind the letter to fully appreciate the magnitude of Paul's words. Jews were taught that one became right with God by adherence to the holiness laws which kept them separate and apart from unclean things. Gentiles were considered unclean yet they were receiving the spirit of Christ and being converted into the new Jewish Christian community. There had been so much infighting among the Jews in the Roman church about how these outsiders were to be incorporated into the body of believers that the emperor at one point banned them from the city.

Paul points out that these believers had "a zeal for God", but they wanted to dictate the conditions under which non-Jews could become part of the family. They were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own way of righteousness. And so he preached a new and liberating idea. Gentiles could also be counted as his children...not by circumcision, but by faith. It is a concept that has come to be known as 'the righteousness of faith', and it declares that all are welcome and made right with God solely by their profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

True faith that leads to righteousness, as Paul knew from personal experience, begins in the heart and works from within, and it goes beyond intellectual argument. "But where does this true faith come from?" he asked. Paul was leading his readers down a path of inclusiveness and relationship...characteristics of the teachings of Jesus...which did not make logical or rational sense to their Jewish ears. Then he asked the question that put their faithfulness to a test: "How will others know about God's saving gift of Christ if someone doesn't tell them?"

Paul's words put us to a test as well. How will others ever come to this table if they are not invited?

I like to think of this Eucharistic meal as an opportunity for God to have some quiet time with us. I call it God's intimacy-with-a-purpose. The Holy Spirit works within to bring believers to Christ but also to renew and strengthen our faith. Communion is more than just a time for our church family to come together and feel good; it is a sacred occasion during which God calls each of us apart from our ordinary existence for inner reflection and conversation with him.

True intimacy between people requires trust. If we meet God here at this table and are able to trust him enough to be completely open and honest with ourselves as well as with him; if we can admit to him the ways we know we need to make changes in our lives, and if we can say "Thank you!" for his major and minor demonstrations of grace on our behalf, then something will happen in our relationship with God.

We will become of one mind and spirit with what is holy and begin to see the context of life as it was created to be. Freed from the confines of our own sense of what is right and wrong we can have a greater impact on our world because we will have the vantage point of God's righteousness.

The partnership we have with God is for life. For a while this summer there was another sign in front of the church that read, *God Doesn't Go On Vacation*. Well, God doesn't leave us when we retire either, so the idea of being effective on his behalf can be a realistic expectation for all of us. At this communion table we celebrate the fact that God is the source of all things. The bread and the cup are here for us to come again and again to be fed, to start over if needed, and to re-energize the relationship with him which gives us direction and purpose for living.

No, God doesn't go on vacation, and God will never let us go. Our lives, like this table and like the story of Jacob and Joseph, are set within the larger context of his love. In one simple sentence, his love declares, Christ is the goal of the Law which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God...

The Apostle Paul has been criticized for various reasons, but I think he was right on the money here. He himself had been an outsider and had condemned those who were not like himself. He understood the difficulty the Jewish community was having in accepting what they had been taught to reject. Going way out on a limb he asked Jewish believers this question...and then let it hang there: "How can they (outsiders) call on someone they don't have faith in, and how can they have faith in someone they have not heard of?"

Paul's question is a question we must all ask ourselves. Our church is like a crossroad in a desert oasis but this communion table was not meant to be a permanent stopping place. Faith Church is like a big extended family but let's not get so comfortable snuggled in our pews that we forget there are others "out there" who desperately need what God provides 'in here'. Not everyone who hears the Spirit's call will accept God's righteousness as their standard; not all who meet Christ will follow him faithfully, but it is God's desire that all be given the opportunity to be here at the table... to be forever with him.

How can others have faith in someone they have not heard of? In a few minutes, we are going to share communion and I hope that question is part of the quiet time each of us has with God. It is not a question of who but of how, for all who eat and drink here in faith are today's designated messengers. We all have different gifts and talents but we are all equal opportunity preachers or 'announcers of good news.'

If it is with our hearts that we believe and are justified, and with our mouths that we profess our faith and are saved, then let us give feet to Paul's words. True faith reveals itself in action. As we continue to worship and prepare to eat and drink together, may the meditations of our hearts honor our God. Then, having received his blessings, let us get up with joy and thanksgiving and go where he sends us with new commitment and new direction.

Praising God let us GET UP AND GO! Amen!