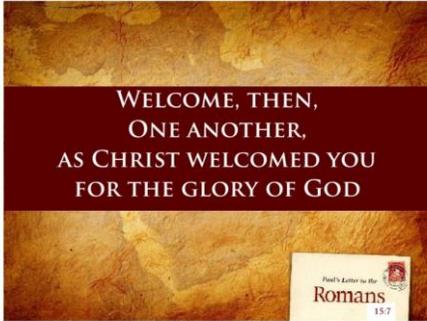


New Hope Sermon Accept One another Romans 15:7



Today I want to dig deeper into a one another we mentioned last week in the acrostic of Love A.C.T.S. – accept one another. Here is the first “one another” scripture we’ll explore this semester. It is from Romans 15:7 *Accept one another as Christ has accepted you for the glory and praise of God.* Since it is “as Christ has accepted you,” let’s go directly to Jesus’ example. Turn to Luke 8:41-48

41 Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house 42 because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. 43 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.

44 She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

45 “Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”

46 But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.”

47 Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

48 Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

Now let’s hear it in the Passion Version, which uses the Aramaic as well as the Greek. There are more emotional meaning conveyed in Aramaic.

Luke 8:41-48 The Passion Translation (TPT)

41-42 Just then, a man named Jairus, the leader of the local Jewish congregation, fell before Jesus’ feet. He desperately begged him to come and heal his twelve-year-old daughter, his only child, because she was at the point of death. Jesus started to go with him to his home to see her, but a large crowd surrounded him. 43 In the crowd that day was a woman who had suffered greatly for twelve years^[a] from slow bleeding. Even though she had spent all that she had on healers, she was still suffering. 44 Pressing in through the crowd, she came up behind Jesus and touched the tassell^[e] of his prayer shawl. Instantly her bleeding stopped and she was healed. 45 Jesus suddenly stopped and said to his disciples, “Someone touched me. Who is it?”^[d] While they all denied it, Peter pointed out, “Master, everyone is touching you, trying to get close to you. The crowds are so thick^[e] we can’t walk through all these people without being jostled.” 46 Jesus replied, “Yes, but I felt power surge through me. Someone touched me to be healed, and they received their healing.” 47 When the woman realized she couldn’t hide any longer, she came and fell trembling at Jesus’ feet. Before the entire crowd she declared, “I was desperate to touch you, Jesus, for I knew if I could just touch even the fringe of your robe^[f] I would be healed.” 48 Jesus responded, “Beloved daughter, your faith in me has released your healing. You may go with my peace.”

This woman had a condition that ostracized her from society, just like the man who was covered with leprosy whom we talked about last week. She had been bleeding for 12 years and that made her unclean. She was separated from her family and from normal community life and she was not only physically drained, financially bankrupt but also emotionally desperate. We don’t know if she was bitter against God and society or just hopeless, but often people with this combination of problems are difficult to be around. They may not be ones we choose to associate with – let alone accept. But look what Jesus did.

First of all the context: Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue had asked for Jesus’ help prior to this woman’s touch. He was the antithesis of this woman – a man first of all, and women were second

class. Then a ruler of the synagogue so a very prestigious man, not a bleeding outcast. And a man with a daughter who was dying, so his situation was an emergency. It was acute, not chronic like hers. But Jesus halted the rapid procession to Jairus' house to reach out to this woman. He had felt power going out from him and he knew someone had been healed. It happened behind him, in the midst of the jostling crowds and he must have figured the person wanted to vanish as anonymously as s/he had come. His insistence that the healed person identify themselves gave him a chance to heal that person's social status and emotions as well as their physical situation.

Putting ourselves in the woman's shoes, she probably had a series of mixed emotions as she desperately reached for the tassel of the robe. She had heard Jairus' urgent request. She knew of his status and the urgency of his situation. She also knew she was not supposed to be in that crowd. So now she had a combination, I expect, of guilt for her actions and presence, and shame for her condition. This Jesus intuited, I expect, as He singled her out. He sought to confront her and then validate her healing in the eyes of the crowd who were likely very upset with her presence and her halting the procession to Jairus' house.

After she came trembling forward and told her desperate story, Jesus first called her "Beloved Daughter." He spoke to her with love and redeemed her place in the society as one of God's chosen people. We can't underestimate the importance of this. So many people today do not know God's unconditional love for them. Our acceptance of them is a visible sign of this. Then he affirmed her faith and courage. And finally, as the Passion Translation makes clear, he sent her on with His peace. "You may go with My peace."

That's true acceptance - when the situation, the person and the context all would further the shunning and the shame of someone. In God's kind of acceptance, we see validated in God's eyes; we affirm what we see God doing in them- Jesus spoke of her faith. And we bless them with God's healing and peace. If the world and even the church would accept each other as Jesus accepted people, wars would stop, bitter feuds and retaliations would cease, terrible oppressions and enslavement of others would be curtailed and the earth will be filled with the glory of God. This is actually the view of the end times when Jesus comes again.

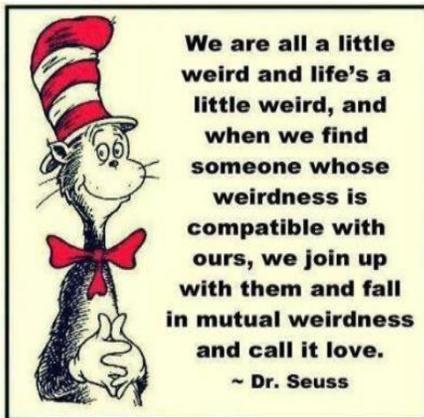
Isaiah says that when the messiah reigns he will *judge the needy with righteousness and make just decisions for the poor of the earth. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat;...the lion will eat straw like the ox; ...they will neither harm nor destroy on all God's holy mountain for the earth shall be filled with the glory of God.*" Isa. 11:1-9. In John's vision of the new heaven and the new earth after Jesus returns, "*that the dwelling of God is with people...he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.*" Rev. 21:1-4. The old order of things - where people distrust and slander and reject and slaughter one another. The old order of things where people are shunned and shamed and rejected.

The miracle of the good news is that Jesus came to destroy Satan with his power of death and to defeat every form of evil and oppression and infirmity that plagues the world and that makes people treat one another with suspicion or hatred instead of compassion and kindness. Through God's mercy in Christians' lives, we can be delivered from such desperate terrorizing or killing of one another, literally or figuratively. We can accept one another; we can welcome one another. We can demonstrate the breaking down of all the barriers that separate us from one another so we can live reconciled by His peace with one another. Eph.2:13-17.

That's the global vision, but until Jesus returns, it begins with us in the household of God as we learn to value one another. Acceptance means we learn to listen so we can know what the other person is

saying and not just concentrate on how we want to answer or contradict or correct them. “The biggest communication problem is we don’t listen to understand, we listen to reply.” Hm-mm.

Acceptance means we see each other with eyes of grace and humor – like Dr. Seuss says.



This is important because the context of our lead verse for the Roman church was the struggle believers were having in judging one another – some said food offered to idols was OK to eat; others wanted nothing that associated them with that former way of life. They also disagreed over which days were sacred. (Romans 14) In other words, the daily choices of how to live out their faith were dividing the church. Paul’s answer was twofold: first, Ch. 15:2 “*Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*” That’s being other-centered. And ch.15:5 “*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves AS you follow Christ Jesus so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and*

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul wasn’t minimizing the differences between believers but rather helping them see the bigger picture of community.

In that context he tells them “*Accept (or welcome) one another as Christ accepted you*” (Rom.15:7). To achieve that welcoming spirit, we work for unity in fellowship – a unity we can reach as we appropriate God’s endurance and encouragement. It is not easy to work with people with very different ideas of theology or appropriate Christian living. But God can give us an other-centeredness that makes this possible.

Now, why is this so important? Paul says when we accept one another it is *for the glory and praise of God*. For the praise and glory of God. It is all about the integrity and uniqueness of our witness so it does bring honor to God. The church is to be the living demonstration of Christ’s signature command to love one another. From that perspective I think the word welcome is even stronger than accept. If we genuinely welcome one another, we have open hands and open hearts for them; we convey our joy in seeing them; we give them value. That has been God’s model for the church from the beginning.

Philip Yancey says, “As I read accounts of the New Testament church, no characteristic stands out more sharply than [diversity]. Beginning with Pentecost, the Christian church dismantled the barriers of gender, race, and social class that had marked Jewish congregations. Paul, who as a rabbi had given thanks daily that he was not born a woman, slave, or Gentile, marveled over the radical change: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Yancey continues, “One modern Indian pastor told me, ‘Most of what happens in Christian churches, including even miracles, can be duplicated in Hindu and Muslim congregations. But in my area only Christians strive, however ineptly, to mix men and women of different castes, races, and social groups. That’s the real miracle.’ Diversity complicates rather than simplifies life. Perhaps for this reason we tend to surround ourselves with people of similar age, economic class, and opinion. [But,] Church offers a place where infants and grandparents, unemployed and executives, immigrants and blue bloods can come together. Just yesterday I sat sandwiched between an elderly man hooked up to a puffing oxygen tank and a breastfeeding baby who grunted loudly and contentedly throughout the sermon. Where else can we find that mixture? When I walk into a new church, the more its members resemble each other—and resemble me—the more uncomfortable I feel.” Philip Yancey, “*Denominational Diagnostics*,” *Christianity Today* (November 2008), p. 119.

We are to welcome one another as Jesus has welcomed us. This graphic is a humorous way to illustrate that.

I love this modern example of what that acceptance and welcomes entails - from Mark Buchanan's church: "A few years ago, a friend assembled a weekend work party to lay sod in his yard. The sun was shining. He had fresh coffee and cinnamon buns. And the crew he'd called together were all good friends. We liked each other immensely. Then Al said, "Guys, do you realize something? This is it! This is it!" We stopped. "Al, this is what?" "This is community." We all murmured our assent and congratulated one another. Yes. This is it.

But then I said, "Al, this is great, but I don't think this is it. I like you all too much. Add a person or two to this company who lacks social graces, who looks different, who's needy, smelly, and irritating. If we truly loved a person like that, then that would be it." Silence. Then one of guys said, "Uh, Mark. We've accepted you, haven't we?" We all laughed, but they granted my point...[Only God can supernaturally subvert our own prejudices, and [give us] a heaven-borne infusion of God's prodigal love...

A year or so after our sod-laying party, Wanda arrived. Wanda was not our kind of people. She was thirsty alright, for beer, port, rum, [whiskey], vanilla extract, whatever. She had only one way to pay for that. I'll let you guess. But she was desperate, and thirsty for something else. She called the church one day, wondering if she could see a pastor...Now! Two of us met with her. She told us her troubled story. I told her about the woman at the well whose life, like Wanda's, wasn't going well. But she met Jesus and he offered her living water. I explained what living water was, and asked Wanda if she'd like some. "Oh yeah!" she said. We prayed. She confessed, repented, surrendered. Drank deep.

The other pastor said, "Now, Wanda, this Sunday will be your first time in church. Don't feel you have to fit in right away. You can sit at the back if you like, come late, leave early. Whatever is comfortable." Wanda looked at him sideways. "Why would I do that?" she said. "I've been waiting for this all my life." That Sunday, Wanda was the first to arrive. She sat at the front, and loudly agreed with everything I said. She was the last to leave. The next Sunday, same thing, except she brought a friend, one of her kind of people. I preached on servanthood. My main point: if you've tasted the love of Jesus, you'll want to serve. It was Communion Sunday. In those days, we called our elders The Servant Leadership Team. I asked the Servant Leaders to come and help with Communion. That day only two of our team were in church. They straggled to the front.

All Wanda heard was the word servant. And she had been listening intently to my sermon: if you've tasted the love of Jesus, you'll want to serve. She walked straight up to serve Communion with the other two "servants." I flinched. Then I remembered Luke 7, Jesus' words to Simon the Pharisee as a woman, not unlike Wanda, washed Jesus' feet: "Do you see this woman?" "Do you see her?" I leaned over to Wanda and said, "Since this is your very first time doing this, do you mind if I help?" So Wanda and I served Communion. The best part was watching the faces of the people I love and serve and pray for and preach to. No one flinched. They saw her. This is it. (Mark Buchanan, "This Is It," *Leadership journal*, Spring 2008).

That's the vision we seek to live here at New Hope. And that's why we serve communion on a totally equal footing with one another. There is not a hierarchy of leaders who serve. We serve each other. And some even kneel before the person they are serving. As I watch the elements being passed from one to another, it always blesses my heart. It's the same reason why as we worship together we use different languages in reading the scripture or singing different songs. Our goal is to bring honor and praise to God and be a mini version of heaven where people "*from every nation, tribe, people and language, [are] standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...worshipping with the angels and the elders and the four living creatures...saying Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and honor and thanks and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!*" (Rev. 7:9-12).

Our Lord Jesus has broken down all the barrier walls and prejudices people have against one another around the world. He has made His people the new people of God, forgiven and made into His image by the Holy Spirit. In the future we'll sing His praise surrounded by people of every language, tongue and culture. But in the meantime, may we continue to live a taste of it here on earth. *Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory and praise of God Rom.15:7. Hallelujah.*

Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson, 2/4/18