

Romans 11:11-21. *Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! ¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." ²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.*

Live in him

1. Be thankful that we are graciously included in His household.
2. Live in a way that may bring others into this family of believers.

This morning we have sprung forward as daylight saving time has ended, but I want to go back to the readings for last Sunday for just a moment. Remember the parable Jesus told last week. The parable of the two sons, the one prodigal son, and the older son who faithfully remained home but then had a hard time forgiving and welcoming about his brother. Which was the better son? That's kind of a trick question isn't it? Each one had their faults. Each one did something selfish to wrong the father. The younger son went off and wasted his inheritance but returned and confessed and was forgiven. The older son who faithfully remained and serve his father needed to be rebuke, however, because he was hesitant to receive and welcome his brother back. The story seems to imply that the older brother was eventually restored as well. At the end of the day what was important to God the Father? Was he concerned about which son was better or that the two sons were united to their father once more?

God surely wants us to live in him and enjoy the peace, the security, the strength and the spiritual wealth of being in his family. He wants us to be thankful that we are graciously included in His household. He also wants us to live in a way that brings others into this family of believers.

God's love extends to all. He wants all people to be saved! But certainly not at expense of the other. This is not an "us against them" scenario. We should not be so quick to pick up the spiritual riches of those who tossed it to the side without being concerned that they lost it. Think of someone who has lost a wallet, we don't just pick it up and claim it as our own

without looking for the originally owner. And so Paul speaks of such a concern of the original owners of God's promises. It would be most fulfilling, most wonderful if the Jews were to repent and both Gentiles and Jews were to all be joined together into God's family united together in praising their LORD. God longed for his lost sons and daughters of Israel to return to him. And that is why we see that Paul throughout his ministry would follow a deliberate method of reaching out to the Jewish nation first. The book of Acts shows us rather clearly that whenever he arrived in a new city he would first go to the places where the Jews would gather together, that usually being the synagogues.

A good example is when Paul reached Pisidian Antioch. He and Barnabas went to the synagogue and after being encouraged by the Jews, began to explain the O.T. prophecies, how they were fulfilled in Jesus, how he was and is the world's Savior. At first the people were receptive of the Word of God, even pleading with Paul and Barnabas to teach them again the next week. But the following week when nearly the whole town showed up to hear Paul speak, the Jewish religious leaders became upset. They began to speak abusively towards Paul even threatening his very life. So Paul and Barnabas had to flee the city, but before they left they proclaimed to the Jews, **"We had to speak the Word of God to your first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."**

As a matter of course, the same sort of things happened wherever Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel. Most of the Jews would reject God's message and therefore rob themselves of the forgiveness and salvation God offered. They would drop those riches, not realizing what they had in Christ. Paul, knowing how valuable the gospel is, would then take these riches and proclaim them to the Gentiles.

In today's lesson, Paul was writing to a group of such Gentiles living in Rome. They had heard about and believed in the resurrected Jesus. By faith they had received the riches of God, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. By nature, and by natural descent they were outsiders, they were not part of God's chosen, they were not part of God's house and yet God in his abundant grace brought them into his family of believers through the precious means of grace. Through word and sacrament, he extended his love to those who were outside of his chosen people. Through word and sacrament God has reached out with his love to us so we too were created new and made believers. God in his grace brought us in even though we are sinners, members of this nation, and not the Jewish nation which whom God had such a relationship. This certainly speaks to the abundant grace of our God that he had to share the message of salvation to the world especially after it was so spectacularly rejected by his own chosen people. With that said, however, God would not give up on his people. The life giving vine that is Jesus Christ continued to stretch out with his grace to the Jewish nation through apostles like Peter and James and others sharing the message of salvation. But God would also intentionally and graciously extend his riches, his wonderful inheritance to people of many other nations through messengers of grace like Paul, through the messengers of the gospel who brought the word to this place, and through those who brought this word to you as well. Paul speaks of God's desire to reach out to both Jew and Gentile and bring them all into this family of believers with these words. ***Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!***

May we marvel each day in how God has been so gracious to us. He took sinners, dead in

sin, without life and he has grafted us into the life giving vine that is Christ Jesus. Like he did for those 1st century Jews and Gentiles in Rome, who were lost in sin, lost in pagan rituals, unbelief, or in the empty rituals of a culture stripped of its true meaning. Like he did for those 1st century Jews and Gentiles he has brought us into his family through faith so that we may enjoy the riches of his kingdom. He has plucked us from sin and death and the awful fate of the fires of hell and he has made us royalty and crowned us with his eternal glory, not because of anything that we had done, but because of his grace and mercy. He has made us holy as we are now connected to Christ, and his peace, and his eternal spiritual riches, and his perfect holiness. These are now ours through the gift of faith. ***If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.***

And so let us look live in grateful appreciation for what God has done. Let us live in peace and harmony with each other in his kingdom. Sometimes, however, that harmony however is disrupted by the sinful heart that remains in all of us. We look not to glorify God and his grace but our focus is more centered on bringing some level of glory to us. Sometimes, even in and among Christian congregations like ours, there is that temptation to play the second brother; to look down on others to make yourselves feel more worthy of God's blessings than another. Sometimes there is this desire to treat those among this family of believers as second rate citizens of God's kingdom so that we may feel more like first rate citizens of heaven. *Well, I was born and baptized, confirmed and married, and then remained faithful in church attendance and the like, but there are some who rejected the message for a time in the way that they lived the decisions that they made. There are some who have sinned publicly in ways that we kind of all know about and so they are not quite on the same level as the rest of us.* God doesn't want us to think and act that way. He wants us to be thankful that we are grafted into Christ. That God took undeserving souls and made this beautiful, incredible, and life-giving bond to Jesus. We are graciously included into God's household, and he wants us to be thankful for each and every soul that is grafted into the vine that is Christ Jesus, because that means that person is connected to the life-giving, life-changing, and soul-saving message of salvation in Jesus. As we think about how gracious he was to us, as we consider how fortunate and blessed we are that he grafted us into the vine, we realize again and again if it were up to us and our faithful service to God we would fail, we would not produce the kind of fruit that God wants, we would wither up and die and then rightfully be broken off from our Savior, just like God's chosen nation.

And so instead of living in personal pride that finds its strength in comparing ourselves against others, let us, instead live in thankfulness to Christ Jesus and how he has saved us. By God's grace we have been grafted into the vine. We have been given life. No matter our background, our personal story, how faithful or unfaithful you have been, no matter how many times I have made mistakes, or you have wandered, or what this person has done, or how long you were gone, there is forgiveness in Christ, and because of his goodness and grace God has grafted all of us into the vine and has connected us to Christ and the riches of his kingdom and the nourishing life that he offers through his word and sacrament. ***17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,***

There is no room for prideful and divisive and arrogant living within God's family, but in the humility that comes from faith, let us thank God for his grace in bringing each one of us into his family and let us live in a way **that brings others into this family of believers** as well.

Paul here speaks of lifting up his ministry to the Gentiles as something that would make his own people, the Jews, envious. And I must admit that it is a bit curious to hear Paul speak of making his countrymen envious when we are so used to hearing that envy and jealousy are sinful. From little on we are also trained to be sensitive to others, to not brag too much about the things that we have because their might be someone who doesn't have what we have. We are trained to not make people envious because that might make them feel bad or left out. And so when is it ok to make someone envious? When you make them envious for the gospel. For if they do not have this they need it.

How do we God about making others envious of the gospel? Without pride or arrogance, but with thanksgiving and genuine gratitude to God speak of the impact Christ has on you. Live a life in the light of Christ so that people become envious of the strength that you possess, the peace that you have, or (one specific example could be) the Christian marriage that you enjoy, for these are all blessed results of being connected to Jesus. Speak of the things that are being done in your congregation, the word of God that you hear weekly, the various ministry that is being carried out, the souls that are being care for and reached. We will, of course, want to do this not in arrogant or prideful or boastful way, but in a way that reflects the wonderful riches that we possess in Christ and how it can make a difference in our lives. In that way let us make others envious for the gospel.

If you are still uncomfortable with that type of phrasing, maybe this will help. A child, a baby, is set in a high chair, and as mom or dad cooks the meal for the rest of the family the child is offered some baby food, but the child is not interested and rejects the food and refuses to eat. However, that same child might respond well to a family who sits down to eat together. The same child, the baby who rejected food just a short time ago may see the others eating and will want to eat too. That is something that the child needs. The child becomes envious of something that it needs to live and grow and be healthy and strong.

In a similar way as members of God's family we can make others envious for the gospel, for this something that all people need to really live and grow and be healthy and strong. As we live lives of gratitude for what God has done, as we live lives of congregational unity and harmony, as we forgive and love each other and encourage one another, and as we lift up the gospel ministry that by God's grace is being done in our midst we may make some people envious of the good news of Jesus. We may make people envious of the peace and the joy, and the eternal riches that our Savior gives to us through the nourishing sap of his word and sacrament. And that is the very point that Paul was making in verses 13 and 14. ***¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.***

God has brought you into his family, he has grafted you and me into Christ and through him we have life, and forgiveness, and the amazing inheritance of eternal life. May this remarkable news lead us to live in Christ and enjoy the peace, the security, the strength and the spiritual wealth of being in his family. Forever grateful that we are graciously included in God's house may we daily encourages brothers and sisters in the faith, and live or lives in a way that highlights Christ's work in and among us so that even more are brought into this family of believers. Amen.