

Advent Midweek 2 – December 11, 2024  
Text: Rom 15:4-13  
Theme: Any Port in a Storm

**You have heard the phrase, “any port in a storm.” Maybe you have experienced a moment when you have been thrown together with strangers under adverse circumstances and everyone left knowing one another’s names. It is easier to forget our differences when we have a common danger or a common enemy.**

**Paul is writing to the Roman believers, some of whom are Gentiles and some of whom are Jews. They were not getting along very well. The Jews thought that they were superior due to Christianity having come out of Judaism and the Gentiles thought they were superior due to being full-blooded Roman citizens. In fact, neither was superior to the other because, like us, they were all sinners who were saved by the blood of Christ. If you’re in a snake pit, and you need someone to pull you out, your pedigree or their pedigree is of little matter to you.**

**We were all sentenced to Hell because of our sin, and without Christ, we would all be lost. Paul made it clear, from his Old Testament quotations, that the Gentiles had always been part of God’s plan for salvation and that Christ had given them a full portion in salvation. With that also comes all the expectations and**

**responsibilities of being a follower of Christ. Therein lies our problem.**

**For the most part, we are all Gentiles in this community, but we still have many different types of Christians in our community. And we definitely do not agree on many things. Across the street, the Romans think the Pope is a higher Bishop than our Bishop. Down the street the ELCA Lutherans think that social issues are as important or even more important than theological issues – or maybe more correctly, they see social issues as theological issues where we would say that all solutions to social issues must flow from Biblical Doctrine. Down on Highland, the Methodists believe that there are stages of grace where one might be more or less saved. Up on St. Charles the Chinese Bible Church doesn't believe that the Sacraments are mysteries of God but rather pious human ceremonies. And if St. Paul were here today, he would remind us that while we should all continue to strive to know the Word and practice the Word to our absolute best ability, we are all part of the same family.**

**In my family of origin, there are four of us siblings. I love my brothers and sister, but there are many things, both theological and practical, on which we vehemently disagree. Yet, let anyone from**

**outside of the family say something derogatory about one of us and you will experience the wrath of the whole Rogers clan.**

**It is walking a tightrope to insist on proclaiming the absolute, Biblical truth of God's Word, and at the same time, showing love and respect for all Christians as part of the family of God. Likewise, although a bit easier, it is important to show love and respect to those outside the family. Our goal is never to alienate outsiders but rather to bring them into the family. Even within this congregation, I'm sure that there are some who do not confess all the truth of God's Word but rather, like human beings often do, they pick and choose according to what they want to believe even if it clearly conflicts with God's Word. And let's stop using that old musty standby, "well that's just your interpretation." The Word says what the Word says and almost all the teachings are very clear, although I will be the first to say that some teachings are harder to understand and to believe than others are.**

**Paul finishes this reading with this blessing,**

**"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."**

**There is the power. There is the power to walk that tightrope of loving others and still proclaiming the true Word of God. The**

**power is found in that very Word of God and His Holy Sacraments. The Word and Sacraments fill us with joy and peace and help us to abound in hope so that we can do all that God calls us to do, even the really hard things. Look at the place you are sitting right now. It is called "the nave" which comes from *navis*, the Latin word for ship. The people at St. A's and St. Paul's, Calvary, and the Bible Church are all worshipping in ships like us and we are all caught in the same storm of this world. On the one hand, we strive to proclaim the truth of God's Word, and at the same time, we strive to love our whole family as we ride out this storm together and sail into the Promised Land.**

**We are never perfect at this. Sometimes we will be too lax and sometimes we will be too vigilant. Occasionally, we get it right, but in those times that we miss the mark, we rely on God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is another thing, perhaps the best thing, we all have in common as the family of God.**