

Sermon on **Romans 11:13-15, 28-32** for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN, Pastor N. Scharf

"Don't give up." Maybe you've said that to yourself or to a friend and teammate as you pushed yourself and them to finish a race, a run or a game. Maybe you've thought it or said it to someone who seemed like they were pulling away, a friend or significant other, "Don't give up on me, on us." "Don't give up" on school, on a relationship, a race, or life. And the results fell where they did. Sometimes it worked and you finished the race, you stuck in school, you stayed together. Sometimes you didn't. Today the Apostle Paul gives us the reason he won't give up on God's mission. In doing so he confronts our laziness, hopeless and short-sighted attitudes with which we give up too easily on what pleases God. He revives, restores and reignites us to action and we say with him, "**Don't give up.**"

Don't give up because God Loves the Unlovable.

- 1) with an unmatched mercy.**
- 2) with an unregretted gift for all.**

"I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" Paul was a Jew, rubbed shoulders with and learned from the best of them, loved them, loved the blessings of growing up a Jew – a knowledge of the Old Testament, the Law of God and the promise of the Messiah. God used that in his life to help him be a great missionary to Jew and Gentile. His main call from God was to bring the Gospel to those who were Gentiles, non-Jews, unbelievers. Paul did this. He travelled to many cities, some of the largest in his day to find Gentiles, and lots of them. But he always tried to start in the synagogue and speak first with the Jews who had the OT promises of the Messiah. They could learn Jesus is the Christ and join in mission work. A few Jews followed but many continued to reject Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. But many Gentiles believed the message of a Savior from sin, the true God and the truth of God's Word and they followed. God poured out his blessing on these primarily Gentile congregations, even with persecutions they suffered by the Jews. *"I am talking to you Gentiles,"* Paul says, Gentile believers. The peace they had, the love they showed to one another, and their zeal to hear the Word of God and to share it with others is something that should still cause us to stand in awe and wonder at the **unmatched mercy** of God.

"I take pride in my ministry" is not an arrogant statement. Paul knew first-hand that **God loves the unlovable with an unmatched mercy**. He was one of those Jews who rejected Jesus, an enemy who tried to kill Jesus' followers and was heading straight for hell. The risen Lord stopped him in his tracks and mercied him, the worst of sinners, and made him his missionary to the Gentiles. Paul went at his work with all his heart. He did not meddle in mediocrity. He was *proud of his ministry* in that he poured his energy into the duties God had given him. He did not think it pointless. This was no garage sale gospel or second-hand salvation. Paul held onto and held out life to a dying world! Paul went at it with all the strength God provided.

"in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them." Paul's hope was that as God poured out his **unmatched mercy** on the idolatrous

Gentiles and turned their hearts to God's forgiveness, grace, and Jesus' life, death and resurrection for them, that Paul's countrymen, the unbelieving Jews, would take note of these blessings and believe in Jesus. It might shake them from their unbelief and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and receive *life from the dead!*

Don't give up! is a message we need to hear too, isn't it? History has shown that when believers of Gentile or Jewish background take God's grace and his Word for granted, their love for others starts to fade, the gathering together starts to become more rote or forced rather than a joyful expression of fellowship with other Christians and an eagerness for hearing the Word of God, receiving his sacraments and praising him. Coming to God's house quickly becomes only "when it's convenient," "when we feel like it," or not at all. Paul confronts our spiritual short-sited laziness here.

Now is the time where we in freedom and with our physical, spiritual and material blessings can grow strong and mature in the Word of God. With the same confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God as Paul had, and with the genuine concern and compassion we have for others we can, like those Gentile converts, be witnesses with our words, our attitudes, and make our unbelieving neighbors or fallen away believers curious about Christ, envious of the peace and vitality we have now and eternally, and willing to walk into this building with us or into a Bible Class or a Bible Information Class, and God may bring them **life from the dead!**

Our reason to reflect and change? You know firsthand about God's **unmatched mercy** for you. God has always been patient with you, hasn't he? Through the ignorance, selfishness and apathy of your younger years, the lustful desires, rash decisions and arrogance of your youth, the pride and misplaced priorities, spiritual shaving short-cuts of your middle years and the worries, fears and doubts of your aging years. But God has never left us even though we oft left him. He has been always faithful, even when we were faithless. It's always been this way, from the **unmatched mercy** you received when Jesus suffered for your sins before you were even born, died for you so that you are forgiven and your life is worth living, rose from the grave to show that God wants you in heaven with him to live for all eternity. You met that **unmatched mercy** at the baptismal font as God washed you clean of your sins and gave you a new heart that beats for him. That same love that won your forgiveness is the same **unmatched mercy** that shouts to you and to me today, "**don't give up because God loves the unlovable – you and me.**" Let your attitude and love for the Lord and his Word be an example to those in your house and to those around you. They can see it. Show them God is not a "when it's convenient" mist in your life, but that He is your life! **Unmatched mercy** is the reason we **don't give up.**

Don't give up, brother and sister. God loves the unlovable with an unregretted gift.
"As far as the gospel is concerned, they (unbelieving Jews) are enemies for your (believing Gentiles) sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

One of the most disappointing things as a parent, auntie or uncle is watching your child at their first Christmas or birthday. You give them a gift you thought was perfect for them, and they played with the wrapping paper and the gift was ignored. Cute at that age maybe, but when you gave the adolescent child a book or movie that held such adventure and knowledge,

they put it on the shelf, unopened. The gift was unused. Maybe you gave a significant gift to help someone or for a certain purpose and it was misused. Gifts unused, or ignored, or misused whether to a child or an adult often leave us miffed at best and infuriated at worst, and maybe we don't want to give that person gifts anymore or take them back. Does God act this way?

God chose an insignificant and helpless people to be his own. He built them into a great nation – the Jews. But they misused his gifts, ignored them, or played with the wrapping paper of idolatry instead of the good gifts he gave. God gave the gift of his Son to his people and they put him on a cross. God would have been just to wipe a people like that off the face of the earth. Meanwhile other peoples (Gentiles) were not much better – living in idolatry, doing dark deeds. God would have been just in leaving them to their plot in life. Jew and Gentile alike were *bound to disobedience* – unworthy of his love.

God didn't revoke his gift or promise. His anger burned against those who turned away, considered them enemies while they raged against him, but the gift was still there – to be returned to at any moment through repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Moses preached it. Isaiah and the prophets preached it. John preached it. Jesus preached it. "Repent!" "The Kingdom of heaven is near." Peter preached it. Paul preached it. We preach it. Enemies can become children again.

God is just when he sends the unbelieving to hell. But that is never his goal for humankind, Jew or Gentile, you or me. He has given us this time of grace. He has mercy on us all. His forgiveness is there for us all. His love continues to call out through Paul's words, through you and me. This unregretted gift reignites us to say to each other, "**Don't give up! and Don't give up on them!**"

Don't give up on living a life that reflects what Jesus means to you. This is not garage sale gospel – you have life! So don't give up on your efforts to grow in God's Word and be faithful in his house, and trust his generosity as you bring your offerings of time, treasure and talents to his house. Don't give up on those people in your life who are lost in sin. Don't give up on the drug addict or drunk, the friend who is confused in sin, or family member caught up in a homosexual lifestyle or some idolatry, the loved one who is neglecting God's house and his Word and seems to have fallen away. **Don't give up.** Make the most of the callings God has given you – first and foremost the calling by his grace that you are a daughter, a son of God, loved by him, with heaven as your home, with his Word leading you and guiding you. Keep praying. Keep aligning your life with the priorities of your perfect Savior. Take the opportunities to speak his love. Live in love and in peace. With Paul, we "*may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.*" **Don't give up because God loves the unlovable – you and me and them 1) with an unmatched mercy, and 2) an unregretted gift for all.** Amen.