

Sermon on **Romans 11:11-21** for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

It does not feel good to be taken for granted. It doesn't feel good when you realize all too late that you've taken a relationship for granted. Either by negligence or prideful attack there are many of us here that have hurt or even gone so far as to end a relationship. Maybe it was a friendship, a relationship with a sibling, a significant other, a spouse, or our child or parent. Sometimes the relationship can be mended, but sometimes it's ended. Either way it hurts. What do we do? God's Word shouts a message loud and clear through the pen of the Apostle Paul,

**Don't Take Grace for Granted.**

**1) God still wants all to be saved.**

**2) You all are grafted into Christ by Grace.**

It hurts when you lose a relationship, and you can feel helpless. Give it to God. He knows. The apostle Paul felt it too. So many of his countrymen, the Jews, had all the blessings and promises of the Old Testament Scriptures, yet in prideful unbelief rejected Jesus, the Messiah, when he came. Jesus himself wept over them, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how I have longed to gather you...but you were not willing."* Unbelief is a rejection of Jesus and God's gifts of faith, salvation, eternal life, a rejection of Grace – God's undeserved love for sinners.

Scripture tells us, *"God our Savior wants all men to be saved... (Acts 4)."* But some reject him. But if there is life in that person's body, there is still time to connect them with the grace of God.

Paul points out what God in His Grace can in the face of rejection, *"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. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!"*

Paul said earlier in this letter, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (8:28).* **God still wants all to be saved.** The Jews had all the spiritual advantages – they were the people of God, the blood descendants of Abraham, with promises of blessing and eternal salvation through the coming Savior Messiah. The Jews rejected the Savior Jesus, schemed to have him die, killed him on the cross, lied about his resurrection, and even after his ascension they persecuted followers of the Way. God used the cross to be both just and the one who justifies. On the cross He punished Jesus for the sin and unbelief of mankind, and brought forgiveness and life for all through his work on the cross.

God used the persecution of Jesus' followers. As Christians scattered for their lives they took the seeds of the Gospel along the Roman roads and across the seas. They brought their faith with them. Miraculously, Gentiles all over, who formerly knew only paganism and idolatries, were saved, coming into the family of believers by God's Grace through faith in Jesus.

God was using the sinful rejection by the Jews to bless the Gentiles with the Gospel. And he used the blessing of the Gentiles to provoke some of the Jews to good jealousy. As the Lord blessed Gentile Christians with faith and its blessed fruits of peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control, the Jews would have to take note that God was blessing the Gentiles. Like the child that initially didn't want to join the other kids in the kickball game even after multiple invitations, but then as they witnessed the great fun and laughter, they were jelly (jealous) of all the good fun, and after another repeated invitation, gladly jumped up and joined. This was Paul's prayer. And this is God's Grace – undeserved love for sinners.

*"I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostles 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? 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."*

Who do you hold a seat for? Some families have the practice of leaving the seat of a loved one open at the dinner table when they are gone on a trip, or to war, or left because of broken relationships. They hold the seat open for them with the prayer that they will return. Some keep a light on. Some, like the father of the prodigal, wait and watch. Who do you hold a seat for? Pray for those who have walked away from the faith and

hold a spot for them. Paul did. Rejoice in the Grace God has given to you and that **God still wants all to be saved**. If some come back to Christ, it will be life from the dead! The firstfruits are followed by a greater harvest!

And always remember: **2) You are all grafted into Christ by grace.** *“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, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.”*

Do we need Paul’s warning? Jesus said, *“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.”* As we sit in God’s house, worshipping him, we can easily look down on those who aren’t as faithful, at those who have wandered from the faith. We may feel as though we would never do that or wouldn’t be foolish enough to do that. Well, Paul and Jesus warn us that to be saved **by grace** leaves no room for arrogance or boasting, as though the church should pat us on the back for being members, or Christ should come down from the cross and shake our hands for our support as though we were helping suffer for our sins.

Do we do this? It is as simple as a judgmental thought about someone in this sanctuary or other Christians – what they’ve done, what they’re wearing, how they’re handling their kids, how they’re taking care of themselves, how they teach or preach or are doing just about anything. With a tinge of pride, we feel we could do it better or could have done it better and deep down inside we find the reason in our sinful nature – because we feel we are better. We look at Peter or other sinner-saints in the Bible and think, “I wouldn’t have denied Jesus.” We look at Judas and think, “Thank you Lord that I’m not like other men, like that Judas.” But we give ourselves a pass to keep our faith hidden in certain places and groups just like Peter did. We get caught in the devil’s traps and lies and despair as though God couldn’t forgive my sin, even doubted our Savior’s promises. We need the warning and the lightbulb moment. Listen to Paul, *“You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”* This is not a reason or time for pride, but thanks for Grace! You were a dead branch but God lifted you up and **grafted you into Christ by grace.**

Jesus said it this way, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned”* (John 15:5-6). Unbelief does not go unpunished. Throwing away faith, or rejecting Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world leaves you with no Savior and no salvation, only hell if, sadly, you die in unbelief.

Jesus and Paul say it with the most sincere and urgent love for his unbelieving countrymen that they might turn and be saved, for his God-given gospel goal Gentiles, and for you, because you are sinners saved solely by the merit and love of Jesus Christ. You have forgiveness in him, and in him alone. You have peace with God through him and him alone. You have life eternal through Jesus Christ and him alone. He did it all. That’s why we can have certainty that you and I are forgiven, because it’s by grace. All these blessings of peace, forgiveness and eternal life are yours in Christ. All this is mine in Christ by grace!

**You have been grafted into the vine, to Christ, by grace.** You were a lifeless branch that he by his mercy and grace grafted into himself. This is your first resurrection story! Don’t take it for granted. Suck up all the nourishing sap that he gives through the Word of God as you hear it regularly on days you feel like it and the days you feel like sleeping in. Stay connected. Receive his body and blood in the Sacrament regularly for your forgiveness and strength. Remember the gifts he gave at your baptism. Live in that identity: child of God, forgiven, heir of eternal life.

Branches bear fruit. As you live in Christ, connected to the vine, you have purpose to serve, to bear fruit – peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. You are the blessing God gives to your family, to this family of believers, to your school, your workplace, and your community. Suck up the sap of God’s grace and serve God and neighbor. As he blesses you through this, he’ll bless others too. And it might just make others jealous and want to know about your Savior. And you can share with them, and with those that come back to the seat you’ve saved, that Jesus is their Savior too. **Don’t Take Grace for Granted. 1) God still wants all to be saved. 2) You’re all grafted into Christ by grace. Amen.**