

09.20.26 ~ Pentecost 17

“Who Dares to Compare?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Assurance

Psalm 103:1-13 ^{NIV}

Pew Bible 521

¹ Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: ⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him . . .

Leader: These Are God's Words. People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 14:1-12 ^{NIV}

Pew Bible 988

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Leader: These Are Paul's Reminders. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Merciful God, we are here again today to worship you and learn from your Scriptures something new about our faith and our relationship. We thank you for the freedom to do so, and we ask you for the insight and clarity of mind to study your word today and throughout the next week. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer as you speak through this messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Did you miss me? Just a little? Probably not because you were in capable hands with David, Andrew, Debbie, and Kyle's leadership! Hope you enjoyed the hymn sing last week. I certainly enjoyed my staycation. Got some personal appointments out of the way, restarted my exercise program for fall, hiked some new trails, and even got some needed rest. So, thank you for carrying on. This is a busy season of events, church administration details, and of course, our budget review and preparation. If you need to discuss your account areas or mission/vision ideas you might have for us, please call me this week! We're gathering the details this week for discussion and then presentation at our October Council Meeting and November 1st Annual Membership Meeting. Thank you.

Let's start today with our Psalm. Praise and liturgy are an essential part of both worship and prayer. When you are not sure what to say when you pray, read through the psalms. You are likely to find one that fits whatever it is you're going through! In Psalm 103, David admits his shortcomings but still praises God for the mercies and compassion he shows his covenant people, Israel. Although a flawed human as God created, the writer's faith helps him lean on a God of love, healing, and forgiveness. Like the eagle after an exhaustive hunt for prey, he needs the Lord's strength to restore and renew; because of God's many blessings

carried out in his life, the writer once again becomes vigorous and vital like the eagle or the man of his youth.

David recaps briefly the Bible history of Moses and his people, their frailty and lack of confidence during the hard times. He admires Moses' strength and leadership as God revealed his mercy and compassion to an undeserving people who doubted his power to save. The psalmist lists God's attributes: he is slow to anger, forgiving, healing, and loving. As a personal hymn of praise, the first few verses are almost intimate, confessing sin and despair. Then he backs up to expand and share his view, a bigger picture to encourage these weak sinful people of God's true love and forgiveness for them regardless of their sin: "¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him . . ."

David does not compare their will (or lack of it) to be faithful; rather, he shares God's love and forgiveness in a way that is just, kind, and universal. I believe he is working out his own human tendency to judge himself or others harshly, and praising God in gratitude that he has more compassion for sinners than David does. That rings true for me some days so when you are feeling all judgy, re-read this psalm.

Over the summer, studying Romans hopefully fortified your own Christian walk; we studied confession, building a strong righteous faith with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and tried to understand judgment in a new way of being rooted in relationship with Christ and wholly forgiven. This last Romans Chapter 14 we'll touch on begins to deal not with us as individual believers but how we relate to and with our fellow believers and how to get along well in fellowship with those who think or

were brought up differently than we were. Paul is lecturing on how not to compare Greeks/Gentiles and Jews. There was potential for great conflict within the church.

Remember we spoke about good fruit and bad fruit on September 6th? Well, the church was judging each ethnic group's practices and rituals about meat eating, cleansing, and their general approach to following Jesus. Paul had heard of these arguments and reminded his readers (and us) that we are to be tolerant and accepting of all believers, even if they are just beginning the journey. Some long-time believers are haughty about their faith, giving in to arrogance that they do religion better than others, or that since they were born into a family of faith they will naturally go to heaven. Other long-term believers can slip into sin and become either lukewarm in their faith or lose their way altogether. I hope you are praying for those that fall into that category. They need to come back to church! No judgment, even though they fear that reception. These who surrender to Jesus again must not be judged by us or anyone else. Who are we to pass judgment? Righteousness, remember, is having a right relationship with the triune God, and that is a deeply personal journey. I would love to speak with you one on one if you have any doubts or difficulty with that spiritual relationship.

The apostle Paul focuses on the practical things that divide the Gentiles and Jews: meat choices, habits, rituals, stewardship, calendaring special days, observing the Sabbath, language, and devotion. Doesn't that sound a little like today's cultural divides in denominations? Political division between liberal and conservative viewpoints were also happening in Paul's day; power grabs can split a church and cause havoc

in churches today. William Barclay says that Paul's efforts are to help believers know that they are to follow God's teachings as they understand them in relationship with him, not because a group does certain things or one gets a reward for going along with the crowd. This is where the Priesthood of All Believers doctrine comes in. Not everyone is trained well to interpret the Scriptures, but through prayer and contemplation, the Holy Spirit is able to inform one's mind and heart of God's purpose, calling, and intentions through these inspired words.

So, what does Paul think we should do in a disagreement with a weaker Christian? Pray for him or her; give thanks for the person's belief and ask for intercession. Welcome them into the family of God, knowing that only God has the right to judge them. All of us will give an account of our lives to God one day, so how dare we compare lives, faiths, or churches? How dare we compare performance? We are to do our best knowing that Christ will stand with us at judgment. We are loved; we are forgiven because of his sacrifice on the cross, his resurrection, and ascension. He is waiting there. This belief is better than judgment. Amen!

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us through your Scriptures each week. May we never forget that you have called us into relationship and glory. Help us to stay close to you through your word and your servants. Help us to obey, listen, and serve others, not judge them. Transform our hearts, Lord, so that we may demonstrate your love to others every day. Help us as a church not to compare ourselves or the institutions, but to keep our eyes upon you and your mission. Be with us this week as we ponder this message, praying these things in Jesus' name, Amen.