

“Someday”
Romans 11:1-2, 13-15, 28-32
August 20, 2017

The events of the past 10 days have seemed almost unreal. What is going on in our nation and our world? The cries of the people are great. The sounds of hatred, anger, and violence fill the air in every direction. Chaos appears to be all around us in Durham, Charlottesville, Washington DC, Spain, Korea, the Middle East, many other places. I’ve seen many people on the news ask, “Why is this happening? This must bring God great sorrow. Is He so angry with us that He has turned His back on us?” These are precisely the questions Paul was asking in our second lesson for today from Romans 11. People who once followed God, namely the Jews, God’s chosen people, were turning away from Him. This so upset Paul that we read a few weeks ago in Chapter 9 that he said, “I would rather go to hell than to see my fellow Jews, who know the Scriptures, turn away from God and die.” That was an amazing prayer that Paul prayed. Paul’s agony continued in Chapter 10 as he saw his fellow Jews trying to make sense of a world that does not make sense, So Paul begins Chapter 11 with a question that was on minds of many people: “Has God rejected his people?” And Paul answers that question by saying, “No, absolutely not. If God had rejected His people, He would have rejected me, a Jew.” God has not rejected anyone and Paul knew this firsthand as God came to him at a time in his life when he was trying to kill Christians, and changed him to be a man who would be used by God to share His Word and love with others, namely the Gentiles, so that everyone would be saved.

While Paul was preaching to the Gentiles, many of them were hearing the Word of God for the first time and believing this amazing news that through Jesus they were saved, but it still bothered Paul that his fellow Jews were turning against God. In verses 13-14 Paul says, “Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” I highlighted that word, “somehow,” because that word does not convey much certainty does it? Despite everything Paul had done to explain the hope he had in Jesus as his Savior to his fellow Jews it didn’t appear to be working, so with the word “somehow” he seems to be asking, “What else can I possibly do?” Somehow if he could just get them to listen and to see the joy that he has in knowing Jesus as his Savior, the comfort that he has in having a relationship with Him, and the peace in knowing that forgiveness has been won through Jesus’ death and resurrection, what a difference that would make in their lives. Somehow, maybe his fellow Jews might be stirred into realizing that every word of Jesus is Scripture that has been fulfilled. Paul cares deeply about his fellow Jews, and I think we care deeply about others and as we see the events in our world we could use this same word to express our concern. Somehow if there was something we could do to get this hatred, anger, and violence to stop. Somehow if people would listen to one another and speak words of forgiveness and receive the grace that God gives, what a difference that would make in their lives and our world.

We cannot hide the truth that we are a broken people filled with sinfulness and God hates sin, but when we remember that God’s love for us is so great, that He sent His Son to die on a cross in order to restore our relationship with Him, I think we are more apt to translate that word “somehow” to mean “someday.” God does not regret making us part of His family, nor does He regret making the people of Israel His chosen people, Someday God will break through the barriers of anger, violence, and hatred in order to restore peace to this world. Someday all will recognize Jesus as God and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Someday God will make everything right, and new, and whole once again as it was in the days when He created the world and all that is in it. So what do we do in the meantime? What does God want us to do? He wants us to do the same thing He wanted Paul and every believer to do and that was to pray.

Look at your hands for a moment. Put them together. The Bible tells us that those who are in Christ, who believe in Jesus as their Savior, God has placed incredible power into your hands. We saw it in the video at the start of this sermon. When we put our hands together to pray, there is power to heal, to forgive, to hope, to bless, and to save lives. When people or when the church says we are going to pray together, something powerful happens. God says in our Old Testament lesson for today from Isaiah that “those who love the name of the Lord...I will make them joyful in my house of prayer.” If you are hurting or struggling in any way, God promises to bring you joy especially when you pray in His House. Why do I say especially when you pray here? David said in Psalm 27, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the

day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling...” David’s greatest joy came not from wealth or the praise of others, but from the freedom to worship in the Lord’s temple. It was there that David could focus completely on God and give to Him all his burdens and fears, knowing that God would hear him.

We can certainly pray to God wherever we are, but David found solitude and comfort in God’s temple. That’s one of the many reasons we built this church facility 11 years ago and are planning to expand this facility; it’s one of the many reasons why we gather for worship – the presence of God is here in this place and He truly brings peace.

Prayer is our presentation of faith before God. When we pray for those who do not know Jesus, those who have rejected Jesus, those who are sick, and those who are hurting, we are in fact offering those upon our heart directly to God. And after we pray God wants us to wait, because waiting on God will keep us in that prayerful partnership with Him.

We see this today in our Gospel lesson where a woman comes up to Jesus and asks Him to heal her daughter. But instead of healing, Jesus ignores the woman, which is really strange because Jesus had never treated anyone that way. But the woman persisted saying, “Lord, help me!” Jesus’ response was to compare her to a dog, which seems even worse than ignoring her. But this word for dog was one that referred to little puppy dogs that children would have in their house as pets, indicating that Jesus had chosen her to be part of His family. Just as people will sometimes give their dogs a little bit of their food from the table out of love for them, this woman recognizes that Jesus loves her, she confesses that dogs love it when their owners give them just a little bit of food from their table, and says that she would be happy with just a few crumbs of blessings from His table. Jesus realizes that this woman understands that He loves her, He commends her faith, and He finally honors her request to heal her daughter.

So is that how God will deal with us when we pray? Will He make us wait for a while before He answers us? Will He allow us to get frustrated so that we will lean more heavily upon Him? Is that what He is doing now as we see the anger and hatred grow in our nation, and as violence continues around our world? To those questions we don’t have clear answers, but what we do know is that Jesus does answer our prayers as He did with this patient and persistent woman in our Gospel lesson.

God certainly is not dependent upon our prayers to act, but we are certainly dependent upon prayer to help us to remain faithful, hopeful, and close to our God. And that is good news not only for us, but for those who continue to be reject Jesus and His ways. God has not given up on us. Instead, He has given us the power to change lives through prayer. He can turn our “somehow” into a “someday,” so keep the faith – even when it seems like our world is falling apart; and continue to pray for our nation, for those who choose violence, and for those who reject Jesus as their Savior, knowing that there is power in our prayers, that Jesus promises to answer, and that He will never turn away from us. And finally, as you continue to pray here in this place, at your home, or wherever you go, wait patiently on God to see what He will do next to bless others and you in the name of Jesus.