



Aldersgate  
United Methodist Church  
St. Louis Park, MN

# DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate United Methodist Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

**Sunday, May 7, 2023**

**Scripture: Romans 1:1-17**

**Memory Verse ~ Romans 1:16:** ... "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith..."

**Context:** This week we leave the Book of Acts and open up the book of Romans, which we'll be in for the remainder of this season of the Narrative Lectionary. Romans is one of Paul's letters, and is his longest and perhaps most prominent. The usual pattern for Paul's letters is that he went to a region, started a church, and then later reaches out to that church for the sake of "checking in", instruction, and mutual encouragement. What sets Romans apart is that Paul did not start this community, nor had he yet met them. He writes them in hopes of being invited to visit them, get to know them, and encourage one another in the work to which they are all committed.

Paul is often critiqued for his long, run-on sentences, but what's important to remember is that his letters were dictated. That is, he talked and someone else wrote down what he said, and we tend to speak in longer, twisting sentences than we do when we write. That said, it can be difficult to follow his main points, as there are numerous and long subordinate clauses in his sentences. Sometime English translations break his words down into sentences that aren't there in Greek (most notably Ephesians 1:3-14). So as you read, it's important to do some parsing of his sentences in order to make sure you're following him and not getting lost.

For example, in today's passage, the first 7 verses are Paul mostly or primarily saying "I am Paul, writing to you in you Rome: Grace and peace...". But then there is a host of descriptors that are important in understanding who Paul is/how Paul identifies, as well as how he understands Jesus. The work of parsing out these long sentences is vital in understanding what he's saying, much like it is important when we are trying to understand much of Shakespeare's work. And, like Shakespeare, one of the tricks of the public reading of such passages, is that if the reader has not done this parsing work and fully understands the flow and structure of the passage, the hearer is less likely to understand and/or connect to it. All of which is to say, read carefully!

## **Questions for Personal Devotion & Small Groups:**

1. What do you hear in this passage? What do you notice? What words or phrases stand out?
2. What meaning do you take out of Paul's introduction? Who is it about?
3. Who does Paul claim he is? Who does he claim Jesus is? Who does he claim the people of the church in Rome are?

4. What does "God's beloved... who are called to be saints" mean? What is a "saint"?
5. A more literal translation could read "to all who are beloved of God in Rome called holy." How, if at all, does that change the meaning for you?
6. What is "righteousness"? What is "holiness"? What is "faith"? What is "salvation"?
7. What is "the gospel"? Why would anyone be ashamed of it?
8. What does the phrase "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" actually mean? Try to break down these "churchy" words to get at the practical meaning of this phrase.
9. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 at the end with the phrase "the one who is righteous will live by faith". Read Habakkuk 2:1-5 and see if that context impacts how you hear Paul's quote.
10. Why is the gospel "for the Jew first and also the Greek"?
11. How do we "live by faith"?

**Prayer for Personal Devotion & Small Groups:** God of grace and peace, thank you for our family of faith, for all who gather around the world united by your love and who, day by day, live out their faith as followers of your Son. Lord, we are grateful for the diversity of the worldwide church, for the people who come together, all different yet united by their faith. We pray especially for Christians who are persecuted for their faith [as well as any who suffer any form of religious persecution], who are not free to express their faith or to speak of it.

Lord, we are grateful for your Word revealed to us in the Bible, which we are free to read and share. We pray for those people who have not yet discovered your Word or who have rejected it. Lord, we are grateful for those people who have faithfully followed in the way of Jesus. We pray especially for the people who have mentored us and who have taken the time to teach and guide us.

Lord, we are grateful for the gifts you have so generously given us. We pray for those people who are less fortunate, those who struggle to survive on a daily basis.

Lord, we are grateful to know that you promise to listen to our prayers and to always offer an answer. Give us patience as we await your answers and courage to respond when you ask us to be the answer. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

