



Aldersgate  
United Methodist Church  
St. Louis Park, MN

# DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate United Methodist Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

**Sunday, May 14, 2023**

**Scripture: Romans 5:1-11**

**Memory Verse ~ Romans 5:1:** ... "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,..."

**Context:** Last week we began our four weeks in the Book of Romans. As mentioned last week, it's important to remember that a lot of the language that Paul uses may seem pretty commonplace for us in the context of Christianity and Christendom, but it is actually the kind of language and ideas in the time of this writing used by Roman emperors to prop up Rome and its empire. Words like "Lord" and Savior" were titles emperors chose for themselves. And the concept of dying for someone or something else was a very present concept for one's loyalty to Rome. It would be like if I (Pastor Paul) wrote a letter to the Christians in Washington DC and described Jesus as our Leader, Governor, Defender of our Freedom, or Commander in Chief. As you read these words from Paul to the church in Rome, keep in mind how sociopolitically subversive some of the language may be.

Since Paul's introduction in chapter 1, we leap to chapter 5 this week. In chapters 2-4, we see Paul laying out all kinds of ideas around being Jewish, the Torah/law, faithfulness, righteousness, and what it all means for the Jew and the Gentile. Unfortunately, it is really easy to interpret much of these chapters in Romans in ways that may seem harmless and even graceful, but are also deeply antisemitic, or at least can lead to (and has lead to) antisemitism. It's important to remember that Paul is Jewish. And he never rescinded on his Judaism, nor did he ever intend to call anyone out of Judaism (same goes for Jesus, by the way). So we must be very careful about our interpretations of Paul's words, and find ways to understand them that fully honor and celebrate our non-Jesus following Jewish siblings.

All of that leads to this week's passage, which may seem like it's coming to an overall main point as it begins, "therefore...", but since the end of last week's reading and up to this one, he has already used "therefore" four times and even the next word after this week's reading is another "therefore". There is a lot in this passage, as there is in most of Paul's passages. Read it carefully. Track his argument/s. What is he trying to say? Do you agree? Is there one overall main point?

**A Bit about, Paul, Romans, Anti-Semitism and Our History:** It's a messy thing. Many of us know that our church's namesake (Aldersgate) comes from John Wesley having his "heart strangely warmed" as Martin Luther's introduction to the Book of Romans was being read at the "society" in London on "Aldersgate Street". But while all Protestants owe a ton to Martin Luther (something about a reformation?), he was also fiercely anti-semitic, so much so, that the ELCA has even published statements condemning his anti-semitism, and has gone through processes repenting

from it. Much of that anti-semitism comes from Luther's interpretation of the Book of Romans (as well as Galatians and other Pauline epistles).

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

1. What does "justified" mean?
2. What is the "glory of God"?
3. How do you feel about Paul's track of suffering leading to hope? Have you found this to be true in your life? How and/or how not?
4. How does verse 9 contradict what Pastor Paul's notion that God isn't angry? That God isn't wrathful? How do we reconcile the Apostle Paul's language about God's wrath with the steadfast love of God?
5. What is sin?
6. What are the specific kinds of things that God gets angry about in the Hebrew Bible? What does Jesus get angry about?
7. What is "righteousness"? What is faithfulness?
8. What is "reconciliation"? How is it similar and/or different than forgiveness?
9. What is "grace"? How do you understand it? What is your understanding of Methodist thinking around what grace is? Is it different than other denominations? Is the Hebrew Bible "graceful"?
10. What is Paul's overall message in this passage?

**Prayer for Personal Devotion & Small Groups:** Merciful God, we do not understand the suffering faced by so many in the world. We do not understand and yet we endure suffering and respond to it. May our responses build up our character and give us hope that we can make a difference. May we listen to your Holy Spirit who guides us in your ways.

Help us to love others as you love us, may we be your hands, offering a touch of healing and comfort. Help us make time to pray for our brothers and sisters, for our friends and our enemies, and transform us through our reconciling relationship with you.

Help us to be confident followers of Jesus, to be bold in our words and actions in our church, in our community, in our city, in the wider world. Unite us in love, and may that love flow out from us, to everyone we meet. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

