

The Greatest Community

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, let's turn together to Romans chapter 15. And we can read again verse 1.

Romans 15 and verse 1. We who are strong have an obligation to bid with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

I want us just to spend a few moments here today just reflecting a little bit on the greatest community of all.

And that is of course the community of faith, the community of the church. And the whole concept of community is something that is very familiar to us in terms of our own background and culture and our own geography.

That there are many different communities to which we belong. There is a geographical community. We belong to a village or a township. We are able in some way to distinguish ourselves from other communities.

[1 : 16] We can reflect on a sense of identity and a sense of functioning as part of that community. We belong to a community in terms of our work and our families.

There are all different kinds of communities to which we belong too. And each of these communities require that we ourselves engage in it and engage in our responsibilities within it.

To be able to function as a family, every member of the family must be involved. We engage ourselves with giving and taking. We don't have everything our own way.

We are called to make sacrifices and yet still be fully involved and fully engaged. And so we are used to the whole concept of what a community is and how a community will function and operate. But when we come to reflect on what the church is and who the church is and our own place and position within it and finding our identity there, we find ourselves engaged in the greatest community in the whole world.

[2 : 31] This community is far greater than any other community we could belong to. This community doesn't belong to one geographical place. It goes beyond geographical boundaries.

From the whole world, people will belong to this community. It isn't a temporary community either. Every other community we belong to is temporary. It will end in one way or another.

Some communities dissolve. Other communities just come to their end. Families even come to their own end. But this community belongs beyond time.

It is a community that belongs in eternity too. And it's founded on the most important purpose of all. It's founded on the purpose of God.

Its function is to fulfill the will of God. And this community gathers in its midst people from all over the world and from all the different ages of the world.

[3 : 35] That there are people there who gather to be part of this community. And yet it remains one community. It is universal. It is the church of Jesus Christ.

And at the heart of its purpose is its unity. It is one people. One church. And it's described in the Bible as the bride of Christ.

And it belongs to the Lord as one unit. One united people. And I want to suggest to you today that our whole sense of unity ought not to be something that is abstract.

It's not just something that we put off and we imagine in our minds and we contemplate how this could function. Or that we reserve this merely for heaven.

That then we will be one people. But I believe that the Bible is encouraging us to work at this. And to make this real. To strive and to engage ourselves in all our functions and all our work.

[4 : 47] To strive together to make this community work. That we are willing on all different spheres to make different communities work. We're willing to make our families work.

Regardless of how hard and difficult that may be at certain times. We want our workplace to work. We want our community to work. Our village. Our township. Our district. We want it to work. And so we should want our church to function and work as well. And it requires that we engage with our responsibility. That we involve ourselves. That we become active. Because the calling of this people, this community, is the greatest calling of all. It is a holy calling. To be one people. To be called out by the Lord. And to seek to fulfill this mandate of unity that the Lord has given to us.

[5 : 45] It is spoken to us on numerous occasions throughout scripture. Time and again we come to this. Time and again Paul addresses this very matter.

Calling us to unity. We don't have disunity because we don't have enough instruction. We do have enough instruction. There is enough information. Our disunity is not because of a lack of information.

It is because of a lack of application. That we're not committing ourselves in the way that we ought to. And what does this mean to us? As we gather in this weekend.

And as we gather today. Especially to prepare ourselves. To sit at the Lord's table. What does this mean when we're called by Paul elsewhere. To examine ourselves.

Before we partake. What are we doing here? What are we engaging in? Well. We're engaging in communion. It's communion. It's communion.

[6 : 48] It's fellowship. And we relate very much this in an individualistic way. That we're examining ourselves and we're considering the symbolism of the bread and the wine.

How this is reflecting to us of our partaking in faith of the body and the blood of Jesus. And yet the reality is we're not sitting there alone.

We're not taking the sacrament in isolation. We're not publicly professing Jesus again until he comes on our own. We're doing this together.

We're doing this as one people. We're in communion not just with the Lord but with each other.

We're committed in fellowship to one another. We are not in isolation.

We are in communion with the Lord and with his church. And so we're called to examine all these things. And to pick up even from last night how we're considering what true greatness is.

[7 : 48] And it calls us to engage ourselves in humility and in service. Not to be longing for thrones for ourselves. But to serve one another. To follow the example of our saviour.

To commit ourselves to each other. To engage and work at our relationship with the church. With the believer sitting next to us. And I think this is what Paul is calling us to do here.

In Romans 15 in verse 1. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak. Not to please ourselves. And he speaks here of the character of this unity.

He says in verse 1. That we're to bear the weak. And so here we are reminded of what Paul is speaking of here with regards to the weak and the strong.

And how this relationship has to interact. Chapter 14 reminds us of this. We read this together. How we're to be there not causing stumbling blocks amongst each other.

[8 : 54] But that we're there to encourage one another. How the strong is to relate to the weak. And this reminds us of the responsibility that is placed on those who are spiritually mature.

That their call is to be careful to those who are spiritually immature. And what is at the very heart of this relationship that we have with each other is love.

In verse 15 of chapter 14. If your brother is grieved by what you eat you are no longer walking in love. Paul wants us to walk in love with each other.

To have at the heart of our community and our relationship. This whole issue of our love. And here as he talks about the strong.

He is telling us at the end of chapter 14. How the strong, the spiritually mature must be willing to curtail their liberties. They have spiritual liberties.

[9 : 53] They can do certain things as they wish. And Paul returns to this of course in 1 Corinthians in chapter 8. And he says at the end of chapter 8. If food makes my brother stumble.

I will never eat meat. Lest I make my brother stumble. He is absolutely emphatic about his care for his brother. His love for his brother is far more important to him than any food that he has liberty to eat.

Than anything he has to eat. He is willing to curtail his liberty for the good of the weak. And Paul identifies himself here as strong.

He realizes his own spiritual maturity. How he has engaged in this walk with the Lord. Engaged in this prayer life and this spiritual disciplines.

In all the blessings that he has received. And he says we who are strong. And he identifies himself there with other believers. And he is saying here we need to think about our behavior.

[10:56] We need to consider how our behavior impacts upon our brother and sister in the Lord. And so what Paul is saying here.

Is that not only does he recognize that he is strong. But he highlights that amongst the people of God. There are people who are weak. And struggling.

And vulnerable. And Paul cares for them. And Paul loves them. And Paul is willing to accommodate them.

And this reminds us again of what we spoke of last evening. When we considered James and John. And how they were jostling for thrones in the kingdom. And Jesus teaches them that they have to humble themselves.

That through greatness isn't about sitting on a throne. But it's about serving. And so we have to see. That this is the position that the Lord is calling us to.

[11:57] An order that is so different to this world. It is so very different. And Paul here recognizes. That those who are strong have this position.

That it threatens to dominate. And what he is teaching us. Is what the Lord has already taught us. It is not to be so with you. You are not to be like the Gentiles.

You are not to be like those. Who lord it over others. In their position of power and strength. Rather you are called to curtail this by grace. To engage with one another.

To be a different kind of community. An absolutely different kind of community. That runs in a different way. And functions.

Aspiring to true greatness. To be Christ like. And what Paul reminds us here too. In verse 1. Is that strength brings responsibility.

[12:59] And Paul is reminding. All those Christians. Who see themselves as mature. Who have traveled on the road. For many years. Who have enjoyed many benefits.

In their own spiritual pilgrimage. That they have a responsibility. That God has placed a burden upon them. Paul recognizes. That he is part of this.

He has got a responsibility. He is called to engage himself. And he says here. We ought to bear with the failings of the weak. He calls us to bear with each other.

The word bear here. Is the word to carry. We have to carry each other. Or endure. Tolerate.

Or sustain. The community of faith. The community of faith is not intolerant. We carry one another. There is this whole issue.

[14:02] Of accommodation. Where we are seeking to engage with one another. Helping the weak. Helping those who are struggling. Those who are discouraged.

Those who are finding things difficult. And Paul goes further. And he says. You are to bear with their failings. With their failings. Their error.

Their faults. Their prejudices. In verse 13 of chapter 14. Paul says. Let's not pass judgment any longer. Let's decide not to put a stumbling block.

Or a hindrance. Let's not pass judgment any longer. Let's stop doing this. Looking down on others. And being critical of them. Rather Paul says.

In verse 1 of chapter 15. Let's bear with their failings. Let's commit ourselves. To endure with their errors. Let's not give up on each other.

[15:04] And let's not give up on those. Whose faith is weak. And tried. And struggling. And in verse 2. He goes on to say.

Let us please his neighbor for good. Let's please others. Let's go further. Let's just not tolerate one another. Let's not just put up with each other's prejudices and faults.

Let's go further. Let's engage as a real community. Let's be deliberately concerned. Let's put others first. Before ourselves.

And Paul is once again putting his finger. On the very issue. Which Jesus is teaching us. The call to humility. The call to service.

The call to be here. And function. As the community of faith. To be different to the world. The carnal mind thinks of me first.

[16:04] The carnal mind. The worldly mindset. Is selfish. And this is invaded in. Even into the very sphere of this community of faith. Even the church has been infected by this worldly thinking.

Me first. We live in an individualistic age. Where people strive for what is good for them. Regardless of how it affects others.

Even damaging and hurting their own families. And their own people. Me first. But this is the danger of worldliness in the church. In our minds.

And in our thinking. And in our attitudes. What the Lord is calling us to. Is to forget self. To forget about the thrones. To forget about.

Having the desire of James and John. To be promoted over other people. To forget about thinking the way the world thinks. But to have a spiritual mind.

[17:04] To be disciples. To follow Jesus. To deny self. To leave your comfort zone.

To see how you can please your neighbor. You remember in the parable of the Good Samaritan. How others crossed the other side of the road. To avoid the man.

Who had been robbed. And left in that situation. And the Good Samaritan comes. And he meets that man in this point of need. He was the good neighbor.

He crossed the road. To meet the need. Of the person. Who was there. Weak. And struggling. And that's what the Lord is calling us to do.

To leave our comfort zone. To deny ourselves. We fail to do. And discharge many of our responsibilities. Because we're unwilling.

[18:07] To accommodate. And unwilling to leave our own comfort zone. And unwilling to cross the road. To meet the need of our neighbor. To help him. And what we're called to do.

Is to see what's really important. And to see for ourselves. That as a people. And as a church. The Lord is calling us.

To something greater. To follow him. And to engage with one another. And it requires the right attitude. Let each of us.

Please. His neighbor. And he goes on to say. To build him up. And this is very simple. What Paul is saying here.

He's calling us. To be constructive. To engage. In this way. And you know of course. What the construction industry is about.

[19:06] It's about building things up. To give buildings. To people. And this is what we're called to do. To build up. To provide something that is substantial.

To serve one another. In this way. What is good for building that person up. So they'll no longer be weak. But that they'll be strong. That we're engaging in our relationships.

In this way. And what we see here. Is how we ourselves. Are challenged once again by the Lord. Because our desire.

Is to build our own place first. To build our own home. To build our own. Fulfill our own ambitions. Build our own career. Build ourselves up.

And the Lord here is calling us. To build others up. To do this for each other. To prefer one another.

[20:02] To engage in this way. And the reality is. That it's easier to tear down. It's easier to hurt people. It's easier to be involved in this way.

In our behavior. That does what is. Not constructive at all. But to demolish other people. And sometimes. You'll learn that.

Sometimes. Demolition is easy. It's far easier than construction. But in certain situations. Demolition takes a lot of work.

And a lot of planning. And engaging in that way. And so itself. Can be complicated too. And yet we can be like that too.

We can deliberately tear people. Down. By the way that we gossip. And exclude. And ignore. And all the time.

[20:59] Hurting people. Tearing them down. What Paul is calling us to be. Is to be the community of grace. That we say that something has happened.

In our lives. That's changed us. That we've had an experience. That we were living in darkness. That we were dead. And now we're made alive. This experience has changed everything in us.

It's changed the way we live. The way we think. What we live for. But Paul is reminding us too. That grace must continue to have an impact. That it impacts not just our relationship with God. But our relationship with others too. That that grace must be seen and evident. That it must be something that's constructive. And building up. It must be something that speaks of love. And that shows that love. Demonstrating it to others. And Paul goes on in verse 3. And he tells us. Christ did not please himself.

[22 : 00] But as it is written. The reproaches of those who reproached you. Fell on me. This is of course. Here he. A reference to Psalm 69. That we sung together.

And here is Christ himself. Demonstrated as the one. Who suffered. For others. The great example. That we have. Jesus did not please himself.

But reproaches fell on him. He suffered for his people. He did the will of his father. You remember in the Gethsemane experience.

In that agony in the garden. He cries out. Not my will. But your will be done. In a sense he's forgetting self.

It's about this self-denial. It's about this willingness. To suffer for others. And the call of faith. Is the call to be like Jesus.

[23 : 00] To follow his great example. That we are called to deny ourselves. And to take up our cross. And again we are reminded. That the sphere and opportunity.

To do this is the church. Paul calls us to this time and time again. To call us. To love one another. To serve one another.

He's calling us to show this. In a daily situation. That there are enough opportunities. That we're not to give up on each other. But that we're willing to move out of that comfort zone.

To be able to see the value of other believers. Not to disdain them. Even in a natural order. They're the image of God.

But more than that. As they come into the churches. They too come to faith. What are they? How does Jesus view that believer? What he sees is his bride.

[23 : 57] He loves her. Our task then is not to tear each other down without gossiping. And our ignoring and excluding one another. Rather we're to see what Jesus sees.

One whom he loves so greatly. He died for her. He died for that person. And we're called to engage. And to realize the great opportunities.

That the Lord has given to us. In verse 15 of chapter 14. By what you eat. Do not destroy the one for whom Jesus died. Stop destroying the one for whom Jesus died.

This is not what we're called to live for. We're called to serve each other. We're called to be like Jesus. We're called to welcome one another.

Engaging with one another. He says this in verse 7. Therefore welcome one another. As Christ welcomed you. And this is the sobering reality.

[25 : 02] He welcomed you. You're talking about weakness. You're talking about bearing with failings. You're talking about building up. This is what Christ has done for you.

He put up with your errors. And your prejudices. And your weaknesses. And your sins. And all that we did wrong.

All our anger. And all our emptiness. And yet he welcomed us. He welcomed us.

He is the one. Who served us. Who did what pleased us. Built us up. He is the one. Who bore without weaknesses.

And still does. And so what Paul is saying to us. In verse 7. Welcome one another. As Christ welcomed you. He's saying. You have the mind of Christ.

[26 : 04] In Philippians. He teaches them there. That this is humility. To serve one another. To take the lowest place. To take this Christ like attitude.

To treat other people. As Jesus treated you. And treats you. You say that you've received grace.

Then show it. Make that grace visible. And in many ways. That's what we do. As we come together at the sacrament. We make something public.

And visible. And what is it. It's grace. And that grace needs to be seen daily. Not just once every six months. It needs to be shown daily.

And demonstrated constantly. Amongst the people of God. For he has a purpose. For our unity. The purpose is part of his own.

[27 : 02] Ordained plan. The divinely ordained plan. In verse six. That together. You may with one voice.

Glorify the God and Father. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is calling us. To engage us. In our position. As part of the heavenly chorus.

To be a community of praise. To have tongues and hearts. That are united together. In the praise. Of God the Father. And our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glory of God. This is what he's calling us to be. And our praise unites. With the praise of the whole church. The whole church. The church here in this world.

And the heavenly chorus too. That we're to engage ourselves. In our worship. With one another. That we will have one voice. That we will have this great unity.

[27 : 59] That we will realize. That there is this relationship. That exists. Between our worship. And our behavior. Jesus teaches us this. Of course in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 24. Sorry verse 23 and 24. If you are offering your gift at the altar. That's worship. Therefore remember that your brother has something against you.

Leave your gift. Before the altar and go. First be reconciled. First be reconciled you brother. Then come and offer your gift. He says there is. Your own worship.

Has itself. Been compromised. By the fact that there is a problem. That has not been dealt with. That you fail to forgive. And so your own worship.

And your own sacrifice. Is itself redundant. And it necessitates. That you engage in this relationship. That you restore unity. That you damage what is broken.

[28 : 58] In relationship. In community. In your worship. And your witness. Because God's purpose. In our unity.

Is that it will be seen. That it was said of the church long ago. By the world. That looked at them. Oh how they love one another. How they love one another.

When we go through the book of Acts. We see the beginning of the book of Acts. The sacrifices that are being made. They're selling their land. And all that they have. In order to ensure.

That everybody's need is met. How they loved one another. And this is what the world saw. A people.

Who loved one another. And the church grew. And multiplied. And people were drawn. Because they went around this world. And they found nowhere.

[29 : 58] Where there was genuine. Real love. Except when they looked at the church. And they saw the church. Outworking the divine purpose.

Of unity. And they looked. And they reflected. At the witness of the church. And they said. How they love one another. They saw there.

The greatness. To which God. Called them to. The attitude. That they had. For each other. This different mindset. This different view.

This different order. This different attitude. And they would say. How they love one another. Are people really saying that.

About us today. This is past tense. More than anything. In our witness. This is what people need to see.

[30 : 57] A community. That loves one another. That is engaged. With one another. A community. That helps.

Each other. And keeps on going. With each other. We are called. To do this. To have this unity. He says in verse 4.

That we are to base this unity. On scripture. We need to have a real. Substantial unity. Every community. That functions. Functions.

Under a governance. You have had here. Recently. A community buyout. The first thing. That a group. Like that does. Is. Agree on their constitution.

Their constitution. Is their purpose. Their rules. What they have agreed to be. And agreed to do. And we have our own. Constitution. The thing we agree on.

[31 : 54] Where we find our purposes. And it is. Absolutely. Foundational to us. It is. The word. Of God. He tells us here.

In verse 4. That our instruction is. From the scripture. Where we have. Our hope. This is where we base. Our unity on. When Jesus. Prays the high priestly prayer.

In John 17. He calls for. The church. To be united. To be one. As he and the father. Are one. And he says this. In the context. Of that they would be.

Sanctified. Through his truth. And we submit. Ourselves. To scripture. We are ordered. By it. In order.

That we can be. The people. Of unity. In order. That we can have. That harmony. That is spoken of. In verse 5. To live. In such.

[32 : 48] Harmony. With one another. In 1st Corinthians. Paul speaks. Of our being. Different members. One church. Christ is the head. We are the body.

He calls us. To function. In that way. We are not. All the same. And we ought. Then not. Be clones. Of one another. We all have. Our own. Individual. Role.

And function. And every community. Needs that cohesion. Where everybody. Is working. Together. To the same. Aim. And the same. Desire. And so.

As it's true. Naturally. It's true. Spiritually. That harmony. Is important. For the community. But it requires. Our work. It requires. That we live out. Our witness.

It requires. That we accommodate. One another. That we engage. And that we would be. Willing to make. Sacrifices. For each other.

[33 : 43] And that we would. Engage. God's help. In the midst of this. Because this is. A spiritual discipline. A spiritual work. Let's pray. Let's pray.

That we would be. The people. That the world. Say. How they love. One another. Let's pray. That this community. Would be the community. Where we have. That harmony. Let's pray.

That the Lord. Would protect it. Keep the evil. One from us. Let's pray. And seek. God's encouragement. In all of this. For we need.

His encouragement. In verse 5. The God of endurance. And encouragement. We have to endure. To again. Persevere with each other. To bear with one another.

To be willing to deal. With the difficult frustrations. And tension points. That will occur. With the failings of others. The failings of ourselves.

[34 : 37] It's beyond us. We need God's help. To be the people.

Who love one another. To be the people. Who God wants us. To be. We're called. To do this. We're seeking to live out. And demonstrate our faith. We're seeking to live it out. In the context. Of the church. To witness.

Visibly. Who we are. To proclaim the Lord's death. In the sacrament. And in our daily conduct. That people would realize.

And know. That we have fellowship. That we belong together. That we belong to the greatest. Community of all. And that we are in communion.

[35 : 35] Not just with the Lord. But with his bride. And as you sit there. At the table. God willing. Tomorrow. You sit with others.

That the person. Who is with you. Is part of the same body. Part of the same. Community. And we're called. To examine our behavior.

Together. Towards the Lord. And towards each other. Let's heed. What Paul says to us. Let's not pass judgment. On each other.

Let's not put a stumbling block. Or a hindrance. In the way of the brother. Let's love one another. Let's. Realize. We have the responsibility. And obligation. To bear with the failings.

Of the weak. And let's realize. That often. We've come short. And we seek. The Lord's forgiveness. The forgiveness.

[36 : 31] Of each other. And to remember. Too. That. The sacrament. Is an opportunity. To renew our covenant. That we would renew. Our commitment. To be the people.

Of faith. And let's remember. What Paul says. A number of times. Elsewhere. That Jesus died. For our sins.

Not just my sin. Not just your sin. Our sins. Jesus died. For our sins.

We belong. Together. We are a family. And may we take our place. With the family. May we take our place.

Committed to that Lord. And committed. To what is good. For his people. And the witness. Of the truth. In the community. And society.

[37 : 28] Around us. That we would bear. With one another. That we would love. Each other. That we would display. Our faith. In this way.

