

Lenten Devotional March 1, 2021

Scripture

Romans 1:1-15

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, 10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish 15 —hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Steven H. Shussett '93

Publishing calendars being what they are, I write this devotional in the middle of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, meaning that I don't know how the story will unfold. Are these words read with relief over a return to normalcy, or with a sigh, knowing difficulties yet unimagined?

For Paul, writing to a Roman church he hoped to visit, the future was no more secure. He knew his mission's intention, but not its outcome, even as he was among the first to articulate what he understood God's desired outcome to be.

This present generation today will remember what it means to be "set apart." If for the gospel, this theology of the cross means following the One who laid down his life, which for us includes loving God and neighbor by keeping physical distance. We don't go out, we don't touch even many whom we love. In so doing—or actually, in so *not* doing—we lay down the life that wants to do what we have always done. Sometimes loving one another is best achieved by not seeing one another face to face, but as through a mirror dimly.

Yet even then the Spirit calls us to be with God by being with others. We pray for one another even when we are prevented from being physically present with one another. We share some spiritual gift to strengthen and mutually encourage one another, whether it be greeting a wizened veteran walking in his backyard, singing from a balcony, or group celebrating-by-Zoom.

To you, 2021 Christian, the question before you is whether the lessons of 2020 have been taken to heart or swept into the dustbin of history. Is compassion our watchword? Is creativity still allowed—in worship and in mutual encouragement? Or have we already forgotten how precious and appreciated simple acts of love and generosity can be?

Prayer

Holy One, we are indebted to you, and to those who have heard you, for inspiring us and calling us to the better angels of our nature. Having reaped some harvest, strengthen us with the Spiritual gifts necessary to sow seeds that eagerly proclaim your gospel. In the name of the Sower himself do we pray. Amen.