

Lenten Devotional March 25, 2021

Scripture

Romans 11:1-12

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." 4 But what is the divine reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. 7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written, "God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; 10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs forever bent." 11 So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 12 Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Devotional

The Rev. Susan Rothenberg '08

When my children were small, one of their favorite books was, *Mama, Do You Love Me?* It is a sweet and simple story of a little girl testing to see whether there are limits to her mother's love for her. The little girl poses questions to her mother, beginning with descriptions of small, mischievous acts like, "Mama would you love me if I threw water on our oil lamp?"—to which the mother replies, "I would still love you." The questions progress to include more and more outrageous behavior, ending with: "Mama would you love me if I turned into the biggest, meanest polar bear with big shiny teeth and I chased you into your tent and you cried?"—to which the mother replies, "I would be very surprised. And very scared. But I would know it is really you inside that polar bear. And I would still love you."

Here in Romans 11:1-12, Paul presents an image of a God who is gracious, kind, and never gives up on God's people, even when they reject God's blessings and become hard-hearted, mean, and sluggish. God doesn't forget who we are inside when we stumble, disbelieve, and snarl at life. Like a loving parent, God will not reject the worst angels of our nature. In fact, according to Paul, God is longing for us to cast off everything that prevents us from living into our true identities as God's beloved children.

In this season of Lent, we are invited to consider our lives deeply, to be honest about the things we have done and left undone that cause us to stumble away from the merciful heart of God. Like the little girl in the story, we can safely think about, pray about, and confess all those dark places inside ourselves because, at the end of the story, we will never be rejected by the One whose love is inclusive, wide, and deep. We do not stumble so we can fall. Every day, through the grace of God, our stumbling leads us right back into the loving arms of Jesus.

Prayer

Holy parent of all people, we do not need to ask whether you love us, because it is your love that gives us life and breath. Forgive us when we stumble, teach us when we are sluggish, open our eyes and ears to experience the power of your Holy Spirit. Let us be so confident of your love for us that our lives become a testimony of your love for all creation. Thanks be to God. Amen.