

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 3, 2017
Romans 11:13-15, 28-32
The Undeniable Marvel of God's Mercy
Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Making a blended family creates challenges. There are your children, my children, and maybe the children we have together. All of them are, of course, our children. There also are blended families through adoption. We adoptive parents get a kick out of people who after meeting our adopted children ask, "Do you have any of your own?" We tell them we have adopted children and a biological child and they all are "our own."

Paul penned his letter to the church at Roman, a blended family. Here Paul explains why and how Jews and Gentiles were blended into God's family, the church. The Holy Spirit had given them all God's mercy through the apostle to the Gentile's gospel ministry. The Spirit gave mercy to them all because they all were disobedient and needed his mercy.

Reading and properly understanding one part of a letter can be a challenge. Always we must read it in the larger context. The context here is that Jew and Gentile alike stand under God's condemnation because of disobedience to the law. That condemnation includes everyone including you. Only God's mercy in Jesus Christ has bestowed reconciliation on the world. That undeniable marvel of God's mercy also includes you.

There is our theme, **The Undeniable Marvel of God's Mercy**. Even in rejection it calls us back. It grants the unlimited riches of salvation in Christ.

Paul gave glory to God alone for his ministry by performing that service faithfully and energetically. He had done his work primarily among the Roman Gentiles but not to the exclusion of his own people, the Jews. The apostle had a strong desire to see "his own people" believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. They were, after all, God's elected people, loved on account of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs.

Although the nation had turned a deaf ear to the gospel, God still loved his people. He wanted them to remember the word God had spoken to their father, Abraham, and to them, "I have chosen you." Paul hoped that the good news of Jesus' redemption he had shared with the Gentiles as the Word of Christ moved on from Israel to the entire world "may somehow arise my own people to envy and save some of them."

Even in rejection God calls us back. Paul hoped many in Israel would think about what they had given up. He hoped they would recognize the foolishness of turning away from Christ and his cross as the only means of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Paul reminded the Gentiles that it was the Jews rejection of Christ that brought reconciliation to the world as the gospel spread to the ends of the earth.

Yet it was not too late. The Jews acceptance of Christ still would give them "life from the dead." Why? "For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." The undeniable marvel of God's mercy is that his mercy always is there for you. The gospel creates the blended family of the church. God's mercy is for everyone's reconciliation because "God has bound everyone over to disobedience."

God brings you and me to the point where we must turn and face God's wrath. We must give up all boasting. We dare not make any pleas in our defense. Then, as one writer says, "the Passionate Pursuer of his enemies, may at last have mercy on them all."

The undeniable marvel of God's mercy is that it grants the unlimited riches of salvation in Christ. "There is no one who is righteous, not even one," Paul wrote earlier in his epistle. God includes us all, Jew and Gentile, under this natural condition. We all have the same starting point. We all have received the same marvelous mercy. God's mercy knows no conditions; not our ancestry, not our boasts or our excuses, not our love. Martin Luther wrote about God's gifts and his irrevocable call, "God's love does not find the object it can love; God's love creates it."

We have received membership in God's blended family, we are God's "children of your own" because God has called us to be that. It is God's will that you are reconciled to him and have come to the saving knowledge of that truth; the saving knowledge we call faith. It is God's undeniable marvel of his mercy that when we all were bound over to disobedience we all received mercy.

There is no place in God's blended family for apathy or ingratitude or rebellion. Often in movies about blended families a main theme is the ingratitude and rebellion of the children against their parent. Shame on

you, shame on me if we do not appreciate and thank our heavenly Father for the daily forgiveness of sins, strength against temptation, and certain hope of heaven he gives us through the gospel in Word and sacrament.

How dangerous it is for spiritual fire to cool to a dying ember. Lifelong Christians sometimes complain about, or are suspicious of the zeal new believers have to witness to Christ and be generous in their service to their new found Savior. Perhaps to apply the apostle's words in a bit of a different way, their zeal and commitment may well arouse us to envy and renewed zeal that pulls us out of our spiritual funk.

Paul gave all the glory to God for his gospel ministry among the Gentiles. He wanted the Roman Gentiles to see how they became part of God's blended family and know the marvel of that call to faith. He wanted the Jewish Christians who would hear his letter to know also that it was God who had chosen them as his own through the patriarchs, and chosen them to receive his mercy as part of the entire world under disobedience and condemnation.

In God's blended family, the church, there are no yours, mine, and ours. There are only God's "children of your own." Amen. <SDG>