

“Live For Something Bigger Than Yourself—Hospitality”

Romans 12:9-21

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In today’s Scripture reading, the Apostle Paul challenges us to think about who we are, the purpose of life and the mission of the church. In other words, he has us answer the question of what we are created for. It is not hard for us to see his point. Do you get what it is? The Apostle Paul wants us to know our spiritual identity using his own theological concepts. Let me repeat our Scripture reading again for you using another paraphrased version in *Living Bible* and find a significant word or phrase that will help you understand his major point.

Don’t just pretend that you love others: really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. **Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honoring each other.** Never be lazy in your work, **but serve the Lord enthusiastically.** Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and prayerful always. **When God’s children are in need, you be the one to help them out.** And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night. (TNB)¹

The key word is *love*. In this, Paul doesn’t talk about your emotions, psychological feelings, or comfortable hospitality. You want to be friendly, but the Creator challenges you to see yourself as a relational being when you say “God is love” or “God created us in His image.” We are not created to be independent from God and others. Rather, God intentionally made us for something bigger and larger than ourselves but also to be interdependent and connected to God and others with a greater purpose. *God is in us and we are in Him.* We are all connected to one another with God and others, not only our siblings, family, and friends but also strangers and enemies, like a spider web. Does this make sense to you? Isn’t life about what you make of it, who you know and what you do? No. This isn’t how God made us. God created us in His image and wired us through “love.”² And this is the spiritual identity of *God’s*

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² <http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/you-were-made-for-something-greater-than-yourself>
Accessed Sept.3 2017

imperative and his command to love God and to love others.

The Apostles' Creed, which we read together, was an early statement of Christian belief. It was first written in 390 AD and was widely accepted in the 4th century.³ The Apostles' Creed begins by defining God as the Father and Jesus Christ as the only Son. The key point is that Jesus was *begotten, not made*. Christianity believes in the community of God in relationships. As I preached last February, *Christianity doesn't believe in God in silence, but is dynamic and is relational in the Trinity*. The only key word to fully grasp and experience God in Christianity is love. We are only able to grasp and experience God in our experiences of love. Jesus proclaimed that everyone is a child of God regardless of their status. Therefore, every one of us is created with God's holy and special purpose, and the church's mission is to spread the good news that God loves everyone.

We practice our love through hospitable outreach ministries and generous giving and sharing. That's our spiritual identity and our spiritual life! Sometimes, I learn spiritual insights from other religions. Rumi, a 13th-century Sunni Muslim poet, shares his spiritual wisdom, "We are born of love and love is our mother."⁴ "I do not belong to any religion. My religion is love. Every heart is my temple."⁵ In the same spirit, the Apostle Paul challenges us to learn and says, "Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honoring each other. When God's children are in need, you be the one to help them out." Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrased version of the Bible, *The Message*, repeats, "Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. . . . Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. . . . Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down." How do we share our love with others, especially people in great need? It is through our humble service of hospitality!



Last week, Hurricane Harvey hit Texas and caused historic flooding. Federal officials report that at least 19 trillion gallons of rainwater, which is enough to cover all of Alaska, California, and Texas combined, has fallen on the state of Texas. As we have saw on the news, the roads were completely submerged and buildings were flooded. There were many rescue stories that saddened us or touched our hearts. And most of you have seen the pictures or videos with massive lines of trucks,

³ The Apostles' Creed can be found in the Hymnal, p. 881.

⁴ <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Rumi>. Accessed Sept. 1, 2017.

⁵ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/rumi.html>. Accessed Sept. 1, 2017.

towing boats, on their way to help Houston.⁶ Someone posted this video on Facebook with the title: *Not a democrat, not a republican. I am an American!*

This video has touched many people's hearts because it shows the needs for radical hospitality. Here is where our Christian values are most needed because we are all children of God and are interdependent.

Maybe you have heard about Pastor Joel Osteen and his megachurch's late response to the need of the hurricane victims. The criticism was that they opened their church late to flood victims. Joel Osteen reported that there were concerned that their church would soon be flooded. But they welcomed people to stay in the sanctuary last Tuesday morning. I don't mean to criticize the megachurch's excuse or their situation. This church's story made me think of the church's mission and purpose in their community. It also challenges us to think about our church's role and mission for our neighbors, too.

Radical hospitality is a form of love and God's imperative. We and our church are the instruments of this hospitality. Thankfully, our denomination has a wonderful disaster response team, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief). One great thing about UMCOR is that one hundred percent of our donations will be sent to UMCOR to be used directly in aiding those affected by the disaster. I pray that we will reach out to the hurricane and flood victims and show our Christian love in our acts of hospitality. Genuine love is our acts of radical hospitality!

Adrienne Clarkson, a Canadian journalist, says, "Each of us is carving a stone, erecting a column, or cutting a piece of stained glass in the construction of something much bigger than ourselves."⁷ I want to challenge us to revisit our Christian spirit, church ministries, and outreach missions. Are we actively doing our tasks in love? Are we actively shining our lights to our neighbors? Or are we hiding our lights under a bushel basket or in the basement? It is time for us to shine our lights and let our God be known before others by our Christian love. Let us continue to do good works for a cause bigger than ourselves. Amen.

⁶ Picture was taken by Jay Janner/Austin American-Statesman

Trucks carrying boats head east to Beaumont in high water on Hwy 90 after Hurricane Harvey on Wednesday August 30, 2017. <http://www.statesman.com/weather/video-shows-line-trucks-towing-boats-texas-highway/0EjyW12syCvoqTo8pvtpsM/> Accessed Sept. 3 2017

⁷ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/adrienne_clarkson.html