

A Daily Dose of Good News

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Vicar Sara's devotion is offered online at <https://youtu.be/9LYmtoMQb0Q>

Good morning! It's time for our Daily Dose of Good News. It's August 18 and we are in Romans 11:13-29. This is Paul, a man raised in the Jewish faith and culture, who became a convert to Christ, on the road to Damascus, and then went about preaching. He made numerous trips and often was the one who went to the Gentiles and preached- so those outside of the Jewish faith originally. So, here he is:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people[e] jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root[f] of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.[g] Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel,[h] if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters,[i] I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

*"Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."*

*"And this is my covenant with them,
when I take away their sins."*

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God[j] for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here ends the reading.

So this text, what is it about? A tree? Is it about branches? Or roots? Or Jews? Or Gentiles? What are we talking about here? What is Paul trying to say in this text? In this, Paul is talking as someone who has converted to what eventually is named Christianity. But, he is of the Jewish faith. So, what he talks about is, as he goes out to the Gentiles, he brags about that, so his fellow Jewish people will be jealous and want to seek: what is this faith that Paul is bragging about? What is this conversion to Jesus about? Paul talks about: 'Don't think you're better than the Jewish people. The Jewish people are called as God's chosen people and they are God's chosen people and that's irrevocable. That will never be taken away'. So what Paul is saying is: 'Don't think you're better than the Jewish people because you believe in Jesus and there are people in the Jewish faith who don't believe in Jesus. Don't think you're better than them. Recognize the Jewish faith is what is the roots of Christianity. Without that, you would never would have been brought in to begin with. So be thankful for that, appreciate that. And recognize that what matters is your faith. And for some of the Jewish people, they talk about the branches being broken off because of their lack of faith'. But it's saying: 'Don't think that's a forever thing. The Jewish people are going to be grafted in. Faith matters. But these are the people called of God'.

So it's one of the first Biblical pieces that I know of, that addresses prejudice as being negative, harmful, and not to be done. Don't think you're better than this other culture, or race or faith. As Christians, even as Jewish people who do not believe in Christ, they are not lesser than. Be thankful for them and realize that we are brothers and sisters. In terms of being elected as God's people, the Jewish people are beloved by God. So, don't think that God puts them at arm's length. Or that God has a problem with Jewish people, God does not. So, I think that's helpful for us to think about. I know you certainly are familiar with anti-semitic thought in the U.S. or anti-semitic actions in the U.S. You may remember that some of those happened as recently as December of 2019. There was a shooting, I remember in New York, in a kosher grocery store. You may remember incidents in California. You may remember when the Tree of Life Synagogue had the shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But I think it's helpful with some of the racial tension that's going on in our world, some of the ethnic tension that's going on, some of the faith tensions that are going on in our world, to recognize, that's not where God lands on this. As Christ followers, Paul is reminding us to embrace each other. Gentiles are to embrace Jewish. We are to do that. Not think we're better than. Not get stuck in any anti-semitic thought or prejudicial thought, thinking we're better than Jewish people. Paul says we're absolutely not. He says 'those Jewish people, even those who fall away from their faith, they are going to be grafted back in. So recognize we're all part of the same tree. There's connection. So, I raise that today for you to think about. I raise that for you today to remember and extend toward Jewish people: your love, your care, as brothers and sisters, and the roots of why you believe what you believe in Jesus Christ. Love one another and enjoy the day. Take care, everybody. Bye-bye.