



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A) – Romans 1:1-7

Focus: *God's Beloved*

word of life

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God ...”
(Romans 1:1-4a NRSV)

Read Romans 1:1-7

The first word in the letter to the Romans is the name of the author—Paul. Although it is typical of letters in the first century to begin with naming the author, the formality of the beginning seems to suggest Paul is not writing to a church he helped to establish or to people whom he personally knew.

1. *What does Paul emphasize in his introduction of himself to the Romans?*
2. *How much personal information does Paul share about himself?*

Paul understood himself solely through his calling from God in Jesus Christ. He was both a servant and as an apostle—one set apart for the gospel of God. His training as a young man to be a Pharisee, a sect of educated men who were set aside within Judaism, might have helped him understand the importance of being set aside for a purpose. As a Pharisee, he devoted his life to studying the Holy Scriptures in order to more fully follow the commandments of God.

3. *How did Paul gain clarity about his calling to be an apostle? (Keep in mind Romans was written at the end of Paul's career.)*
4. *What motivated Paul to write this letter to Rome and to hope for the opportunity to visit the church in Rome?*

So what is this gospel of God all about? What is the good news of God? First, the *gospel* is not new with Paul; rather, it is good news proclaimed by the prophets recorded in the Holy Scriptures. For the gospel is about God's own son, a descendent of David. No wonder this text is assigned to be read during the Advent season, as we recall the prophets of old who prepared the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus is “declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:4 NRSV) It is critical to understand Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and Son of God—the one who defeated death and was resurrected. To be connected to Jesus is to be connected to God. It is through Jesus Christ that Paul received both grace and his calling.

For Paul, his unique calling as an apostle was connected to the Gentiles. He realized his audience in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, would have been primarily Gentile believers. Paul understood himself to be called, but also believed his audience was also “called to belong to Jesus Christ” and “to be saints” (See Romans 1:6-7 NRSV) because of his or her relationship to God.

5. *What does it mean to belong to Jesus Christ?*
6. *Is a saint perfect? Explain your answer.*

Paul referred to his audience as “God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints.” (Romans 1:7 NRSV) Paul's introduction was complete. In this brief passage, he not only introduced himself and the gospel of God revealed in Jesus Christ, but he also revealed his understanding of the people in Rome. He wrote of them as “God's beloved.” What a tender perception of people whom Paul had not met.

Word among us

The preacher was fresh out of seminary and in the call process at a small church. She was asked to preach a “trial sermon” for the congregation. Not all were convinced a woman should be preaching! A few knew even before they heard her preach that they would not be able to hear a female voice, so worship would be a waste of time.

As the preacher stood in the back of the sanctuary waiting to enter during the opening hymn, she was fidgeting and looking nervous. An older usher quietly went up to her and whispered in her ear, “We all are rooting for you. Just remember we are your friends and we truly want this to go well.”

What a loving gift given by that usher to the young preacher. Even before the sermon was preached, he understood his congregation as God’s beloved who needed a preacher to proclaim the gospel in their midst. He did not declare the people in the pews to be perfect. No, he knew they were all sinners in need of the grace of God and redeemed by the love of Christ Jesus.

1. *How did the usher’s encouraging words help inspire the seminarian to preach?*
2. *How do you try to encourage and support preachers as they proclaim the gospel message?*

Sometimes hostility and strife can creep into a congregation. There are times when the match between preacher and congregation might not be the best fit. Nevertheless, the congregation and preacher are God’s beloved—recipients of God’s grace and love made known in Christ Jesus. God defeated death and brought Jesus back from the dead for God’s beloved. Believers are called to be saints--holy people set aside for the gospel of God.

3. *What does it mean to you to understand yourself to be God’s beloved?*
4. *What, if anything, changes as you interact with others in your congregation and perceive them to be part of God’s beloved?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us four things about himself—his name, his claim to be a servant of Jesus, his role an apostle sent by God, and his understanding of being “set apart for the gospel of God.” (Romans 1:3 NRSV) He doesn’t brag about all the churches he started, or his travels, or his adventures. The message to “all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints” found in Romans 1:7 (NRSV) is bigger than the specifics about Paul the man.

Take a moment to reflect on how you typically introduce yourself to a stranger. Ponder the similarities and differences between your introduction and Paul’s introduction of himself recorded in Romans 1:1-7.

5. *What observations did you make when you compared your introduction to Paul’s in Romans?*
6. *Complete this sentence: “I am servant of Jesus Christ, called to be....”*

Prayer

God, you who brought Jesus Christ from the dead, awaken us to respond to your calling to be servants of Jesus and part of your beloved community.

last word

Be intentional about offering an encouraging word
to the preacher and worship leaders