

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
August 31, 2014**

**Romans 9:1-5**

**ROOTS**

**Questions for reflection:**

- 1. What did God do?**
- 2. What will you do?**

**Hymns: "This is my Father's World" - 384 -  
Distribution: 397, 349 - Closing: 326**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

***Romans 9:1-5 – I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.***

A recent gospel song has these words:

Grandpa was a farmer when I was a kid  
He never made no money but he loved what he did  
He'd get up in the morning and go milk the cow  
Get out his old team of mules and go to the fields and plow  
He took us to church on Sunday he taught us how to pray  
And I remember the things he used to say

He'd say young'uns don't forget where you came from  
And don't forget how God's been good to you  
Be proud to be raised in the country  
Stand up for the old red white and blue  
It won't hurt to get a little dirt on your britches  
When you go out into the woods and pray  
Young'uns don't forget where you came from  
Where I'm going and when you meet me there someday

If you like gospel music, perhaps you've heard that song. It's sung by a quartet called

The Marksmen. The song's key line is, "Young'uns don't forget where you came from."

Have you ever had someone tell you that? "Don't forget where you came from." My mother, who came from a coal mining family of 13 in Pennsylvania, has said that many times. No matter where you may go, what you might learn, or what you might achieve, don't forget where it all started. Don't forget your best friends or family friends or family members. Don't be arrogant toward people who don't have the same abilities as you. And remember those people who helped and supported you in becoming successful.

As we continue the summer sermon series we've been following in the book of Romans, we see the same concept, but for a few different reasons. The concept we will focus on today is ROOTS. The Apostle Paul will be reflecting on his roots and on the Church's roots. **But rather than being a nostalgic journey into the past, let's focus on two questions that these verses lead us to ask:**

- 1. What did God do?**
- 2. What will you do?**

**1. What has God done?**

Paul wrote, "*I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*"

As chapter 9 opens with these words, it is obvious that Paul was experiencing deep feelings. He opened this section with a triple-promise that he was speaking true words, even putting an oath in his third declaration:

- *I speak the truth in Christ*
- *I am not lying*
- *My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit*

What truth does Paul feel so passionate about, to declare such sincerity? **His pain and anguish.**

These really are vivid words, as Paul begins his thoughts on his ROOTS:

- The two words Paul uses for “sorrow” and “anguish.” Other English words that convey the concepts in those original Greek words are: Distress, heavy sorrow, emotional pain, consuming grief. Both of these words depict deep pain, pain that can be affecting body and mind.
- Paul adds the adjective “unceasing” to those nouns. It is a continual, incessant pain that he has.

Have you ever had an emotional pain that consumed you? A grief that was relentless? A sorrow that you woke up with and went to bed with? If so, you can relate to the Apostle Paul’s feelings.

This pain has to do with the ones that he calls his “brothers,” his “kinsmen.” These were the people of the Israelite nation that he shared a bloodline with through his mother. Why does he have such pain? Because many of them were going to hell.

It is remarkable that Paul felt this way at this time. By the time he wrote this letter, he had been bringing the gospel to the Mediterranean world of his time – Jewish people included – for almost 20 years. He had been beaten, flogged, arrested, stoned and left for dead, put him into prison, run out of town, and followed to the next town for more. We would understand it if Paul would have said, “Let them go to hell. They’re asking for it!” But we don’t hear Paul talking that way. He bared his soul and revealed that their unbelief and impending demise was breaking his heart.

Paul was especially grieved when he looked back at their history and remembered what God’s great love for them had done. Today’s Old Testament lesson that recounted the deliverance at the Red Sea was a great illustration of his mercy toward the Israelites. In our reading, Paul mentions:

- “Adoption” – This is reminiscent of God’s call to Abraham in the Old Testament. God chose the descendants of Abraham – the nation of Israel – to be the ones to whom he revealed his plan of salvation, and the ones that would be his special people. To what other nation had God said that?
- “Glory” – God had revealed himself in visible manifestations of his presence. He hadn’t done this to other nations around them. We might recall especially the time when Moses dedicated the Old Testament tabernacle in their wilderness wanderings. On dedication day, the glory of the Lord – in smoke and fire – visibly took residence in the tabernacle!
- “Covenants” – God had made an original covenant with them that if they would follow his ways and worship him as the true God, he would give them the land they were entering. He would prosper them greatly. He would protect them from all their enemies. When they were not faithful to him, later in the Old Testament he revealed through Jeremiah he would make a new covenant with them and send that Savior he had promised from the time of the fall into sin.
- “Receiving of the law” – To what other nation had God given his very commandments? At Mt. Sinai God gave them directly to Moses, who relayed them to the people.
- “Worship” – To what other nation had God prescribed the building plans for the church and the rites of worship that were to be conducted? Their worship calendar with its festivals and sacrifices were given directly by God.
- “Promises” – The promises of not only a Savior, but also of protection and deliverance were theirs.
- “Patriarchs” – The legacy of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with other memorable ancestors were their heritage.

- “Christ” – The Savior of the world, Jesus Christ himself, came through their line. He was not a Philistine. He was not a Phoenecian. He was not an Egyptian. He was an Israelite!

These were not just charitable acts God did for them. **Through these gracious acts God brought about the Savior of the world, true God and true man, who came to win salvation for all people.** He would live perfectly in mankind’s place, obeying all those commandments God had given to Moses. And he would die on a cross for the sin of the world, paying for mankind’s sins. He would win the only way possible for anyone to be saved. Through faith in him, peoples of all nations can receive this eternal gift. And it had come through the ROOTS of the nation of Israel!

But by and large, they had rejected him. The Old Testament nation fell away from God again and again and found other gods from other nations to worship. In Jesus’ own time, we heard in the Gospel reading how he was rejected by the religious leaders of his day. Later on, those leaders would incite the crowd on the first Good Friday to shout, “Away with him! Crucify him!” And as Paul had taken the message of salvation to the world of his day, many of the Jewish people he encountered rejected the gospel and persecuted him.

Can you imagine Paul’s feelings as he reflected on the tragedy of this? They were his flesh and blood! Jesus, also knowing that his own people, his own flesh and blood, were rejecting him wept when he rode into Jerusalem on that donkey for the last time, saying, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.”* (Matthew 23)

Let’s pause here for a first lesson. Do you ever feel the type of anguish that Paul felt? Let’s face it. We live in an area where acceptance of the message of Christ as the only Savior of the world and the submission of people to the commandments of God is not common. People are rejecting the message of

God in Scripture and the Savior that he has sent. These people are your brothers and sisters in humanity, fellow human beings. Do you anguish over this?

Do you have unceasing sorrow and anguish in your heart? Do you lose sleep over that? Does your heart break? Or are you tempted toward ignoring the tragedy of a humanity that is headed for hell? Many days I fear that people of God are not concerned about this tragedy at all.

**May Paul teach us a lesson on passion for the lost!**

## 2. What would you do?

That leads us to the second thought that Paul has in these verses, as he reflects on ROOTS. What was he moved to do about it?

For a long time, as we said, Paul had tried to reach out to them. He had argued persuasively in synagogues that Jesus had come in fulfillment of the Old Testament’s promises and had won the world’s salvation. He had talked personally with countless individuals. He had endured persecution. Paul would write in 2 Corinthians 11 about his labors for the gospel and the sufferings he endured: *“I have been in prison... I have been flogged severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*

And after all that, what are his thoughts now? He wrote: *“For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.”* In an amazing show of love, Paul declared that he would wish he could be damned in their place if it would result in the

salvation of his people, the Israelites! Would he really do that if he could? Remember what he said at the beginning of this section! *“I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.”*

Remember how someone else felt that way? Someone else who wanted to take on their sin, your sin, and the sin of the world and suffer for it himself? Someone who was willing to die for them? (And you!) In a Christ-like attitude, Paul felt the same way! **We must realize that he would never have the power, holiness, or authority to do that, but he would have done it if he could have!**

Here lies our second lesson for today, as we examine the ROOTS of our faith, our church, and our Savior. We talked about how we feel about the world around us rejected the Christ and the gospel. **Now, what will you do about it?**

It's a good day to ask ourselves how mission-minded we are and how mission minded we are together as a church. What will you do?

- Will you pray for the millions in our country and the billions in our world that are perishing in their sins?
- Will you invite that one person or family to simply come with you to God's house here to hear the word of God?
- Will you patiently continue to work to win that relative back who has strayed? There can sometimes be a tendency to not want to talk about the topic of religion with relatives and avoid the conversation, perhaps even with some relief!
- Will you talk about Jesus with your neighbor? Will the urgency about heaven and hell motivate your timetable?
- Will you reach out to a Holy Trinity member that you know who has become inactive and is on a path away from our congregation? Or is that just “elders work?”
- Will you be moved to get involved in our church's program of outreach? Could you participate in formal events

and activities that our church uses to reach out to the community around us?

- Will you be more eager to support our synod's missions and be interested in what our mission dollars are doing in God's kingdom?
- Will you do the same for our local high school, Evergreen, and for the ministerial education system in our synod?

Also, what about the work that we do together at Holy Trinity? Are we mission-minded? Or, as we walk together as Christians in our congregation, is our focus inward? Simply on our four walls? Simply on keeping the institution moving forward? Simply subsisting and existing? Operating a “maintenance ministry? Keeping tradition intact? Or worse yet, do you never even think about the mission of our church or playing a part in it?

How can we not? This is too meaningful to us. It works us up too much. It moves us. It gives us the same feelings that Paul did as he thought about his ROOTS and the ROOTS of the gospel he proclaimed. There is work to do in the mission of our church and school as we look out into the community in which God has placed us and as we realize the points of contact he has given each of our members with people in the world. That's what we think about today as we reflect on ROOTS.

So today, may we thank God that through those ROOTS he won our eternal salvation. May we see our fellow brothers and sisters in the world around us in need. They need to know about the Savior that came from those ROOTS also. And may the love of Christ motivate us to action in reaching out to them in love! Amen.