**Symbols of Christ in Stained Glass: Root of Jesse - October 27, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Romans 15:7-13 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Accept One Another**

**I. You have a common Savior**

**II. You have a common hope**

*Accept one another,* *then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews* *on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises* *made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles* *may glorify God* *for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."* *10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."* *11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."* *12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse* *will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."* *13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace* *as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Do you recognize this book? It’s *The Lutheran Hymnal*. This served as our synod’s worship book from 1941-1993. In 1986, in preparation for the new hymnal, *Christian Worship*, which we use today, our church body’s *Commission on Worship* published the *Sampler*, a thin paperback booklet, which contained 21 hymns, a revised version of the order of service, and some psalms set to music. The synod was getting ready to change everything that I knew and held dear. I remember receiving the change will open arms as did many others in our congregation. There were others who stood vehemently opposed to this change. How dare they change my hymnal! The committee who was working on the hymnal project actually received hate mail from members of the synod.

The Bible addresses this: matters of opinion. God has not commanded us which hymns we must sing or how we must order our worship service. What God does say is that when his people discuss these matters of opinion that they accept one another. That’s what the Holy Spirit will teach you this morning through the Apostle Paul. Accept one another, because you have a common Savior and you have a common hope.

In the Christian church in Rome 57A.D. , there were two main clicks: Gentiles and Jews. These groups had two very different religious backgrounds. The Gentiles had been, for the most part, heathens. They had worshiped the false gods of Roman mythology. The Jews who had converted to Christianity had the rich ceremonial worship commanded by the LORD God. When they came together for worship there were tensions. The Jews were still uncomfortable eating foods that were not kosher. In Christian freedom they were allowed to eat any kind of meat. The Gentile Christians looked down on the Jews because they were not comfortable with the foods they (the Gentiles) were eating. The Jews also were still sensitive to worshiping on Sunday. As Jews, they still felt that Saturday, God’s ordained day of rest, was still good for them. In Christian freedom, they were allowed to worship on any day of the week. Jesus had come and was the true Sabbath rest. The Gentiles looked down on their fellow congregation members as weak. The bottom line: these were matters of opinion and the members were letting those opinions get in the way of what really mattered.

Nothing has changed in 2000 years. As 21st century Christians we have differences of opinion. Which hymns will we sing? What style of music will we use? Which translation of the Lord’s Prayer will we use? Will we stick with the wording of the King James Version and use the “thee’s”, “thou’s” and “thy’s?” Will we use the NIV version which is in our current hymnal and use the “you’s” and “yours?” When we discuss the budget for 2014 today, which is our ministry plan for 2014, how will we decide to spend money to carry out our mission? There will be differences in opinion

That’s exactly what they are: matters of opinion. God hasn’t commanded a style of music, which translation we should use to say the Lord’s Prayer, or how we use the offerings. But he does tell us in the Bible, that when a difference in opinion arises, to first go to Scripture and make sure that what we are doing is pleasing to God. And then ask, “Is this beneficial for the Church of God as a whole?” And most importantly, he tells us how we ought to act toward each other when these matters of opinion come up. He tells us, “Accept one another,” as brothers and sisters in Christ.

But that’s hard to do, isn’t it? In matters of opinion, usually something changes, something that was familiar and comfortable to me. I feel like something has been taken from me. It was what I grew up with, the way we’ve always done things and it’s fine - thank you very much! When matters of opinion come up in the church, there is complaining, there is accusing, there is whispering and grumbling and judgmental attitudes.

It’s a matter of pride and selfishness, isn’t it? This is what I like, what’s best for me. If that’s true, then what I am doing is for my glory, not to the glory of God. If what’s most important is what’s comfortable to me, then that’s not the main point of why we’re here - to hear what God says. If people hear my grumbling and complaining, I may actually drive others away from coming to God’s house and hearing God’s Word. Maybe I focus so much energy complaining about matters of opinion that I forget to focus on what’s most important - how can we do the best that we can to share the message of Jesus to God’s people and to the unchurched.

In the end, what I’m really doing is plugging my own ears and refusing to listen to God who says to me, “Accept one another.” When I continue not to listen to God’s Word and make my opinion and my reasoning more important than what God commands me in his Word, that’s a dangerous place to be spiritually.

How do I get myself to the place God wants me to be - to accept one another in love? To alleviate tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul pointed them to what they had in common. In vs8 Paul wrote, **“Christ has become a servant of the Jews to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.”** God made promises to the Jew’s ancestors, and in vs.12 Paul quotes one of those promises. Isaiah had prophesied, **“The Root of Jesse will spring up.”** A man by the name of Jesse from Bethlehem had many sons. The youngest was a boy named David, who became king over Judah. King David’s family enjoyed hundreds of years of a royal dynasty. Eventually King David’s royal dynasty resembled a stump of a tree that had been cut down. But God had made a promise that from his family tree, the Christ, the Messiah, would be born.

What connected the Jews to the Gentiles was that the promise of the Root of Jesse was a promise made also to the Gentiles. **“The Root of Jesse will spring up, the Gentiles will hope in him.”** Even though Jesus lived and worked among the Jews, he sent his apostles to the Gentile nations, so that they by believing in Jesus, could be grafted in to that same tree, the family tree of God. Even though they had different cultures, different opinions, they had a common Savior, who accepted them as members of his family.

That’s what unites us as brothers and sisters, isn’t it? God the Father accepted the fact that you and me, we all are sinners, sinners who have failed to accept each other in love and forgiveness, sinners who have grumbling and complained against each other, sinners who must die, as God says, because of our rebellion, sinners who must be punished for their pride and selfishness.

But what also unites us is that we have the same God who loves us and does not want to see us punished. God accepted the fact that the only way to save you from suffering in hell for eternity, to save you from punishment, to save you from death, was to send someone as a substitute for you, someone who would love people perfectly. God accepted the fact that he needed someone whom he could then punish for the sins of the world, so that he could accept you, for God cannot accept sinners in his presence. He accepted the fact that that someone was his own Son.

Jesus accepted the fact that he and he alone could accomplish this. He accepted the fact that he and he alone had to accept your sins as his own, as if he had committed them, as if he were the one who was selfish and prideful and unloving. He accepted the fact that he had to be punished for your sins, he had to suffer the pain of hell because of them, and make your death his death, and that’s what he did. So that he might present you as acceptable to God. And that’s what he did.

Paul in Ephesians wrote, **“Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.”** That’s what unites us - one baptism into one Lord Jesus Christ; one faith in that same Jesus, united as the holy Christian Church. We are a communion of saints, a group of people who have been made holy by the blood of Christ, and that’s how we stand before God.

Will we still have differences of opinion? There will be as many opinions as there are hymns in this hymnal. Regarding those hymns, the music, the wording of the Lord’s Prayer, how the money is spent in the budget - decisions will have to be made. But in everything we do at this congregation, we will keep before our eyes and in our hearts as we make those decisions that Christ has accepted you and you and you. You have a common Savior. Accept one another.

In Bible class a few weeks ago we were discussing these very things, matters of opinion, as we looked at Romans chapters 14-15. The discuss moved to how our congregation lived through the ups and downs of building a new church. Someone said, “You know pastor, I still hear grumbling about the colors in our sanctuary.” There happen to be a guest sitting in the class and he raised his hand and asked, “When did you dedicate your church?” I informed him, “December 2011.” He replied, “In my humble opinion, I think it’s time that you moved on, don’t you?”

That was Paul’s point in vs13, to keep moving forward, to keep looking ahead. **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”** When people hear the word hope, they think of hope in this way, “I hope it doesn’t rain today because I need to do some serious yard work accomplished.” Hope in the Bible is different. Hope is never uncertain. Hope is not some pious wish. Hope is the sure and certain confidence we have because we have a common Savior. Our hope is in Jesus. We are confident that he lived for us, that he died for us, that he rose for us and that he will come again for us. That is our hope. And it is sure and confident. We confess that hope together in our creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.” This hope unites us.

When we talk about hope we have to talk about the colors in the sanctuary. Do you know why these colors were chosen? There is symbolism in the blues and the golds. Gold is a regal color, fit for a king. It reminds us that Jesus is our King. Blue is symbolic for hope in the Bible. In hope we look to the blue skies, from where our Savior will come as our King and bring us home to heaven. It is that common hope that encourages us to accept one another. The more often we come together to hear about that common hope, the more we come together to receive Holy Communion, the more we will let that hope bring peace and unity and joy in God’s church.

Because there will be differences in opinion. Another new hymnal is already in the works. It is scheduled to be completed by 2025. Some of us will be singing from God’s hymnbook in heaven by that time, others, who have not yet been born, will never know this red hymnal. And still others of us will have to make a transition to new hymnal once again. But we know that when we talk about worship, and hymns, when we discuss the budget, and the wording of the Lord’s Prayer, we will accept one another, because we have a common Savior and we have a common hope that unites us. I pray that **the God of all hope would fill you with such joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** Amen!