

McCabe United Methodist Church
Pastor Ray Baker
Your walking around life...
Romans 12:1-2
July 24, 2011

This summer Pastor Rick and I have been preaching about difficult or unusual bible passages. Last week I preached about the development of the Christian Church within the context of the Roman Empire. The Empire and the Church can be characterized by the following beliefs:

Roman Empire: Divine Emperor, war, victory = peace.

Christian Church: Covenant, non-violence, justice = peace.

Today's scripture from Romans isn't an unusual scripture. I'm sure you've heard it preached about a number of times. But, it is a scripture verse that is difficult to live up to, because it's difficult to see the line between our cultural beliefs and our religious beliefs.

For example, I've hear a number of people say:

“We need to keep a clear separation of Church and State. The Church shouldn't meddle in matters of the State.”

But, the separation of Church and State is a political position that doesn't match our religious beliefs. In fact, the Church has always believed it was responsible for speaking out against political injustice and corruption. That is the purpose of the Prophetic books of the Old Testament.

The problem is that when good Christians debate these issues it is difficult to identify the line between positions of the Church and positions of the State. We often speak from a position of the State in the name of the Church.

When I get into these discussions I try hard to remember the adage:

Do not meddle in the affairs of Dragons for you are crunchy and good with ketchup.

The book of Acts teaches us the early Church was full of people devoted to worshiping God in the Synagogues and in their homes, and to doing good-works and acts of charity; as a way to offer “Peace” to a people living in world ruled by an oppressive Empire. They dared to live differently in a world ruled by a Dragon, ruled by a Beast.

There is a book that I keep hearing about called: How the Irish Save Civilization, by Thomas Cahill. I've seen it so often that I had better give in and read the book.

Before I read this quote I will remind you the word catholic, spelled with a small “c,” is a word that describes the Church universal. It is a way of speaking about all Christians, not a single denomination.

“At the end of his book How the Irish Saved Civilization, **Thomas Cahill** points out that the entire world is divided into Romans and catholics. “The Romans are the rich and powerful,” he writes; people who run things their own way and must always accumulate more and more, because they believe in their guts that there will never be enough to go around. The catholics, on the other hand, are universalists — people who instinctively believe that all humanity makes one family. Catholics are convinced that ‘every human being is an equal child of God, and that God will provide.’”

Which camp do you find yourself falling into? I believe there is some Roman and also some catholic in all of us.

We can easily see the elements of Roman in our culture when we travel to a big city like New York. I’ve been to NY fifteen (15) times and I would go fifteen more times if I had the chance. I love NY with its skyscrapers, loud sounds, 1,000’s of yellow taxi cabs, the buses and the subways. I love the fast paced lifestyle, commerce (every store I can imagine), and the Broadway plays.

I’ve been to NYC on Church related trips, which have given me the opportunity to see the city from another perspective. I’ve helped feed the homeless, hungry, and working poor at the largest food shelter in Brooklyn. I’ve gone to a youth shelter where the case workers are helping homeless kids get off the streets. I’ve met with kids and adults living with AIDS/HIV. I’ve talked to families who have been evicted from their homes, not because they weren’t working, but because their money was spent on medical bills.

On a smaller scale we can see these same things right in our own community. We can see those who are always seeking more and those who are trying to make ends meet. There are those people who give very little of their time and resources to charity and there are those who give abundantly...and live simply.

Although the Roman approach to life is very different from the catholic concept, the two are not mutually exclusive. We can be both Roman and catholic, regardless of our denomination, our job, or our political party.

The world tends to reward Romans. BUT, the question we should ask ourselves is: What kind of focus does God want us to have? God has a different agenda. Christians are called to:

- Loving the homeless men who beg nearly every weekday at the I-94 off ramp at State Street.
- Loving the teenager who bangs up the family car ... again ... and again.
- Loving the employee who can’t concentrate on us, the customer, because of a problem

at home.

- Loving the teen who has some new body piercings and tattoos.
- Loving the neighbor with the rusty pickup truck they park in front of our home.
- Loving the nursing home resident who can never remember your name.
- Loving the children in our Say YES program.
- Loving the families you serve through a church mission project ... across town, or across the globe.

Christians are called to offer extraordinary love in a world that honors power. We are called to exemplify humility in a world that seeks prestige. We are to share our resources in a world that believes we always need more.

As members of the Church universal that believes in “the Risen Christ,” we are called to love with our whole heart, our whole mind, and all of our strength. We are to set aside the benchmarks of success and focus on the teachings of our faith and on worshiping/praising our God.

Christians offer the world a “Love” that is based in action and treats everyone as an equal, as a precious child of God. This is the “Love” that never runs out, because it is not a commodity. Instead, it’s a continually renewing gift from God.

Let’s take a moment to revisit our scripture lesson and hear how a Eugene Peterson phrase today’s scripture in the Message.

Romans 12 Place Your Life Before God

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, (and) develops well-formed maturity in you.

The world calls us to be Romans, seeking power, prestige, and more and more, and more.... As catholics, members of the Church Universal, we are called to give all that we have and all that we are to Christ. We recognize our intimate connection to the whole of creation. We have a deep knowing that we are responsible for all of Gods children and accountable to our God our creator.

So offer your life, even your walking around life, to the God of our Faith. Amen.