

# Sermon Text for January 22, 2017

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Numbers 14:26-35, Romans 1:1-11

*“Ouch, that hurts”*

Romans is considered the book of the Bible, or the letter that most clearly explains to us what we believe and why we believe certain things. We have looked at prayer, we have looked at faith. We have said, but haven't really seen, that this book is not necessarily for the meek or for those who just might be along for the ride. Paul doesn't fool around in Romans and today's Scripture kind of gives us a first glimpse into how serious he takes this whole relationship thing with Jesus Christ. Romans is considered a very fundamental, basic letter that gives us a first step in understanding and living out our faith. That is why we have called this series, Romans, faith for dummies, that's us, dummies.

Today, Paul speaks about criticism or what we often refer to judging. I think one of our favorite statements as Christians when we don't want to pass a value judgment or give our opinion or make a decision on something we will inevitably say: you know we are not supposed to judge. That one phrase, kind of like the phrase, what kind of liability will be face, that one phrase, don't judge, basically ends the conversation. Today Paul talks about judging and the importance of judging.

We all know that receiving criticism is never enjoyable. But criticism can often be helpful to us as individuals. We are working from the assumption that the word criticism and judgment are the same. One sign of a strong Christian is someone who is not only able to receive criticism, but grow from it as well. The sign of an immature Christian is one who isn't able to deal with criticism.

Today we find ourselves immersed in a culture of criticism and cynicism. No matter what action one takes it is subject to and often receives criticism. Criticisms can be used to build up but also can be used to tear down. Protests for peace, a form of criticism, on Friday and Saturday that turned violent do not help. They are counter productive and we need to be able to call them that. But criticism can also be a call to reflection on what exactly is good according to Scripture: to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. But more times than not criticism is painful, it hurts others so we need to be very careful as Christians how we criticize or judge, if we even choose to do so at all.

In these verses Paul addresses complacent Christians who criticize at all times and may even know what is the right thing to do is, to do good, and yet consistently do that which they criticize others of doing and are blind to it. Paul's words today just might hurt, so fair warning, if you are listening, we just might hear Paul speaking to us.

We had a great weekend at Sandy Cove. Your leaders went and we met. For our Bible studies we asked the question how do we reflect the unity that we currently have within this congregation to a society and culture and a nation that is badly divided. How do we become a great witness to those around us as to how we can live together and move forward together to work on kingdom goals and still be different and yet be united.

We also asked the question of do we as a church need to address issues that Scripture addresses which have become politicized and if so, how do we do that. The idea of immigrants within our Lancaster county came up and how it is a very, very divisive issue and yet we are able, as a church, to speak truth to this issue which comes directly from Scripture. We are called to do good and what does that look like? How do we balance a politicized issue which has been taken by culture and society and strip it of its charge and be able to do good with it in our community. We decided it had a lot to do with how the issue is presented.

In the Old Testament there are two events that people use more than any other to describe how badly Israel turns its back on God and does what God obviously does not want them to do. The first we read last week was the creation of the golden calf which most of us describe as the great apostasy of the people, turning away from God to idols. The second is a little less known and it is the Scripture that we have just read.

Joshua, Caleb and others have gone into the promised land as spies to see what it is like and to bring a report back to the people. When they got back Joshua and Caleb report that it is a land flowing with milk and honey. The other ten report, it is a land that devours its inhabitants and they strike fear into the hearts of the Israelites who decide that it is probably better to not go in there regardless of what God has promised them.

Those who complained, complained because they did not see, and were not able to see God's presence and hope in a promise that he had given them. So because of their little faith, God judges them. But his judgment comes from his mercy. If they had only followed his desire and his will they would have inherited a land with endless possibilities. The land was before them and they refused to go, it was too risky.

Let's be clear on this, the people did what was wrong in the eyes of God and judgment was pronounced. The judgment that was pronounced was that the people would receive what they said would happen because of their fear.

In 14:2 the people say that they wanted to die in the wilderness and this was fulfilled as God states in 14:29. They did not want to enter the promised land and in 14:30 it comes to pass. They are afraid for their children as they state in 14:3 but then we find that only they will be able to enter the land. The 40 days of exploration turns into 40 years in 14:34. You really need to be careful what you ask for, as the Israelites found out. Their criticisms of God does not produce helpful insights. Their complaints for the way that God runs things is not constructive and does not provide God with different ideas. There are times when criticism helps, and other times when it is better to be silent and just know that God is God and that we are called to follow while he is called to lead. Each one of these issues could have been turned to positives if the people were able to shy away from their complaining and their criticisms of what God was doing in their midst.

Paul in Romans speaks about what happens when we criticize or pass judgment on one another. When do we have the right to encourage our brothers or sisters in Christ without being seen as nosy as judgmental? Here is an interesting psychological fact. There have been tests conducted on characteristics and actions that people do or have that really bothers us. You know if a person is disorganized, too loud, irresponsible and so on those things can really upset us. There are just certain things about certain people that just get on our nerves.

Well, 80% of the time those things that bother us about other people we usually have the same fault. It is more than likely that whatever we can't stand about a person is usually some kind of defect that we ourselves have. Jesus doesn't tell us not to take the splinter out of our neighbors eye but rather first, first take the log out of your own then you can see the splinter more clearly because more likely than not the wood is the same, our ineptitude corresponds to other peoples' apparent faults.

Paul likewise here states the same thing. He doesn't say don't judge. But rather he states in verse 1: We are more likely than not guilty of the very same things that we are holding others accountable for but not ourselves. It is called hypocrisy. God will judge us even more if we try to judge others and yet continue to sin in the ways in which we think the other person is sinning.

Whenever we want to be angry with someone for something pause and ask, am I guilty of the same action or of the same sin. Here Paul states that knowing what is right doesn't necessarily help us if we aren't doing what is right. Christians can be perfect examples of people who know the teachings of Christ, hear about them, understand them and yet do not put them into action in their daily lives. Paul states we are going to be judged if we are only as I John 4 states if we are only hearers of the word and not doers.

This hurts because often the grace of God is seen as a license to irresponsibly, to doing that which we please, but not, Paul states that God's grace, his kindness is to lead us to repentance. Grace leads to repentance and not irresponsibility. The reason these verses hurt is because Paul states that we will be repaid according to our deeds. Those who do evil even if they know the good will be repaid with wrath. We have a certain responsibility that we cannot escape. John 14:34 Jesus states: If you love me you will keep my commandments. And our commandment today is to look at ourselves before we criticize and see what it is about us that bothers us about that other person.

Hear the judgment and the criticism and don't let it just hurt but let it affect your lives. Amen.