



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

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## “The Gospel of Salvation”

Recap of Sermon from 5/7/23 by Robb McCoy

Scripture: Romans 1:1-17

Paul’s letter to the Romans is as timely today as ever. As Douglas Avenue UMC in Springfield became another church in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference that is a Reconciling Ministries Church, 28 churches in the IGRC have been approved for disaffiliation, and more congregations continue to discuss and discern how to move forward, Paul’s letter to the Church in Rome continues to speak to us.

In this opening of the letter, we see Paul’s motivation and intention for writing. On a practical level, he is paving the way for a visit. He wants to come to Rome and visit the church he has heard so much about. He has friends there (who he greets near the end). He has heard of the faithfulness of the people of Rome, and he must be aware of the struggles they face. In the heart of the Empire, the church of Rome must have struggled with identity as much or more than any other church.

The Emperor had probably expelled Jewish people a few years before this letter (the date of this expulsion is not settled, but usually placed around 49, with Paul’s letter coming a few years later). The followers of Christ in Rome were undoubtedly unsettled by this decree. They must have also found it difficult to operate as a community of love and Grace surrounded by the heart of the Roman system of exploitation, social stratification, militarism, Greek god-worship, and patronage.

Paul’s letter was also meant to encourage the church to continue to hold together – in the face of cultural pressure and internal strife. The church faced clashes of class, ethnicity, religious background, and cultural awareness. It was difficult to be Jewish in Rome. It was difficult to follow Christ in Rome. It was difficult for Jews and Gentiles to form community together in the midst of all of these pressures. What was true then remains true today, following Christ can be difficult in a world built on Empire’s principals.

In this introduction, Paul reminds them of their purpose, and lays out his own. He reminds them that it is Christ who unifies them – Jew and Gentile. It is a great tragedy in that in the course of human history this letter has served as fodder for anti-semitic hatred. The purpose of the letter was not to foster strife, but to advocate for unity despite these divisions.

The promise of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that was present through Abraham, David, and the Prophets, is the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. He was reminding them that it was the same Spirit that empowered the Church in Rome. It is the same Holy Spirit that is alive today in the Church today, despite the divisions. It is the same Holy Spirit that can sustain us through peri-

ods of discernment and disaffiliation; and it is the same Holy Spirit that guides this congregation in acts of welcome and reconciliation. The Holy Spirit has been a part of our Reconciling Conversations, and continues to guide us as we move forward. Paul’s letter to the Romans remains a valuable source of encouragement and spiritual truth for us today.

The Romans to whom he was writing were well aware of the power of Empire. Roman power tried to extinguish Christ. Roman violence was meant to destroy not only the body of Jesus, but eradicate his memory. Crucifixion was designed to render the victim so shameful that no one would ever be willing to claim knowledge of the person. That Jesus was willing to endure this kind of punishment is proof of his love for all people. Jesus believed in his message – a message of good news to the poor, freedom from bondage, welcome to the stranger, healing for the sick, and justice for all people – that he was willing to die for it. His willingness to die for love showed that the power of Rome could not overcome him. Christ’s resurrection is proof that God’s love – not Rome’s violence – prevails.

This is the message of the gospel, and this message that was first communicated through the Law and the Prophets is now revealed to all through Jesus. Paul’s letter is a reminder that the power of Christ unites us, even when clashes of culture try to separate us. Paul’s letter is a reminder that living like Christ and loving like Christ is never easy. A system of love, forgiveness, hospitality, and generosity does not work well in a culture of violence and Empire, but Resurrection proves to us that Jesus’ way prevails.

The culture of Empire pushed for division, and still does. Empire culture pushes for exploitation. Empire thinking pushes for fear, mistrust, suspicion, and judgment. Empire enforces conformity, strict orthodoxy, dogma, and one way. Christ’s Way is that of Beloved Community. Beloved community is built on bonds of friendship, forgiveness, mutuality, and respect.

A community built on Christ’s love and faith in him can persevere. It will persevere. Paul’s letter is a reminder of that truth. And Paul will not be ashamed of that truth. Churches like Douglas Avenue UMC will not be ashamed of that truth.

Crucifixion was meant to bring shame. Crucifixion was meant to destroy and suppress. Resurrection means we need not be ashamed. Resurrection means that we can draw strength from Christ and from one another. As the world splinters, fractures, argues, and grows ever more distrustful, the community of Christ can embrace diversity, celebrate differences, and welcome all.

Paul’s letter to the Romans was meant to remind them that Resurrection joins people that were thought to be forever separated, and it continues to remind us that nothing can separate any of us from the love of God in Christ.