

**"What It Means To Be Saved"**  
**Studies in Romans**  
**Lesson Seven: "Salvation and Inclusion"**  
**Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Lectionary Year A**  
**August 7, 2011**  
**Text: Romans 10:5-15**  
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With the beginning of what we have come to know as "two-a-days," we are coming closer to the beginning of football season, not nearly close enough for me, since I associate that season with much cooler weather, which I am sure those actually participating in two-a-days would greatly appreciate. Football season evokes a number of memories for me, not the least of which is the memory of Saturday afternoon neighborhood games in Chris Kaden's backyard when I was in elementary school. It was there we pretended to be members of the Gainesville Leopards, competing for a state championship.

I remember that as I would leave the house on those Saturdays, my mother would say to me, "Remember to include *everyone* in your game today." Sometimes she would go so far as to name specific individuals. Those individuals might include the new kid down the street who had just moved to town and hadn't enrolled in school yet or the kid who was not the least bit athletically inclined and could not catch a pass if his life depended on it or the totally obnoxious and

offensive kid despised by everyone in the neighborhood. In my mother's world of neighborhood football, which much later in life would become mine as well, all of these people should be included.

Inclusion is a difficult thing, as I found out early on in my life. It flies in the face of such ideas as "winning at all cost" and "survival of the fittest" and "birds of a feather flock together." It means that everyone is to be included, no matter what. It means having inclusion as a guiding principal of life and understanding that every other principal is in the service of that one guiding principal. It means that unless there is inclusion of anyone and everyone, nothing else matters. For whatever reason, that is the idea my mother instilled in me with respect to neighborhood football games in particular and life in general.

In our passage of scripture for this morning, inclusion becomes the dominant theme. Paul begins by talking about how Christ represents the end of the law by terminating the law as a means of salvation and by being the culmination of the law by reconciling us to God and to one another. Paul makes it clear exactly how we are saved through faith in Christ—by believing in him in our hearts and confessing him with our lips. In other words, we are saved to the extent we relate to God in Christ both inwardly and outwardly, that is, with our thoughts and feeling and also through our actions. We don't

simply believe; we also confess. One is what is unseen by the world; the other is clearly visible to the world.

Paul goes on to state his understanding that the natural result of saving faith is what we might call evangelism or witness or sharing. Once we have found Christ or, stated perhaps better, have been found *by Christ*, we naturally are motivated to want others, particularly those we care about the most, to share in our experience. We "pass it on," so to speak, just like we do when we discover a great new restaurant or a particularly enjoyable book, play, music group, or movie. We include others in our discovery; we make sure other people have the chance to experience what we have. Inclusion, then, becomes the result of salvation. When we are saved, we make every effort in a reasonable and responsible way to include others out of our love, care, and concern for them. *Salvation leads to inclusion.*

My decision to become a United Methodist minister was not instantaneous. It came about as a result of a journey or pilgrimage over several years, but one that began when I was in high school. That process started in large measure because of Dave Tanner, whether he even realizes it or not. It was Dave who insisted that I attend a Texas Ecumenical Youth Council Camp at Brownwood in the summer between my sophomore and junior year in high school. It was there I discovered a whole world of Christian life beyond the narrow confines of my own

particular faith tradition, and I also discovered that it was a spiritual life far more intellectually stimulating and far more emotionally satisfying than I was accustomed to. In other words, I found out that in other faith traditions I got to think and have fun, things I was not particularly encouraged to do in my own church.

Dave also was a part of the second step in the many that ultimately would lead to my becoming a United Methodist minister. During my junior year in high school, Dave and I were playing in a band together. One night at band practice, he came in and said, "You will never believe what Bourdon wants us to do." Let me speak parenthetically so as to help you understand the meaning of Dave's statement to us, the rest of the band members. Bourdon Smith was the Pastor of Whaley Memorial United Methodist Church in Gainesville at the time, the church where Dave and his family were members. He was a real character, so much so that it was not uncommon at all to hear sentences that started with the declaration, "You will never believe what Bourdon wants to do or Bourdon has done or Bourdon is doing."

If you think *I* am pretty far out there at times, you should have known Bourdon. I pale in comparison to the man who later became a role model and mentor to me and many other ministers in our Annual Conference. Among my favorite all-time stories are those involving

Bourdon. Just to give you a frame of reference as to how radical he was in his day, when Bourdon died, his memorial service included eulogies from two United Methodist ministers—one before and one after the eulogy given by John Wiley Price. That's way further out there than I ever will be. Aren't you glad?

So Dave came to band rehearsal to tell us what Bourdon was asking us to do. According to Dave, his pastor wanted us to come and provide the music for a contemporary service he was planning at Whaley. Let me speak parenthetically again. This was 1966 for those of you who think contemporary worship is a relatively new thing. It really is a relatively old thing, and I, for one, have been involved in it for forty five years, which is I am over it and have moved beyond it.

Back to the story. Dave told Bourdon that we didn't know any "church" songs, to which Bourdon responded by saying that he didn't want traditional religious music. What he was looking for was music of the day. He wanted popular songs that had meaning for us, songs that carried a message we could relate to.

I don't remember what we wound up playing. I think there was some Simon and Garfunkel included. What I *do* remember is that it was the first time a minister had asked me, along with Dave and the other members of our band, to bring *our* music to church. It was the first time I was asked to set up my drums and play them in worship. It

was the first time that who I was as a rock musician was acknowledged and appreciated at church. *It was an inclusive moment*, a moment when I felt like I could bring my whole self to church without leaving any part of me at home in the closet.

Therefore I eventually became a United Methodist minister whose purpose for being in ministry is inclusion, to include others, *all others*, just as I was included. *Inclusion can take many forms*. It comes in many shapes and sizes. Stephanie was told a story that occurred recently at Buckingham UMC in Garland where we used to serve. They have started a community garden. As they began working on the project, an elderly man who lives right behind the church came over to help. No one at the church had ever seen him before.

As it turns out, his wife had suffered a stroke and was bed-ridden. He could not leave the house for very long at a time, but he was anxious to be able to do something productive and beneficial. When he saw the garden being prepared, he excitedly became a part of the endeavor, since he could volunteer his efforts while being close to his house at the same time. That is an example of a church putting itself in a position to be inclusive, reaching out to include anyone and everyone.

I also love the story told by Mary Beth Anton, Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Midland and Chaplain of the Trinity School there. As she writes,

A woman in our church turned fifty and in an effort to celebrate the occasion her husband offered to give her a grand party. She began making plans but was troubled by the expense and the fuss dedicated to her birthday. So instead of a party for herself, she and her family threw a Thanksgiving feast for the members of the church and its neighbors, including the community who gather nightly to share their meals at the local soup kitchen. She hired the best country-western band in West Texas.

On the night of the party, all were welcomed, both neighbors who had never darkened the doors of the church and lifelong members. Everyone sat around tables eating and listening together as the band played old-time gospel hymns. Following dinner, Jody Nix and his Texas Cowboys cranked it up. Before long the wooden dance floor at the front of the fellowship hall was full of dancing couples young and old, members and neighbors dancing and laughing together.

I do not know if anyone was converted that night, but Jesus was present and introduced all around. I do know that several who have never been to church before are attending worship regularly on Sunday mornings. Because of the party, the members of the church have renewed their efforts to welcome visitors into their midst.

Paul reminds his readers of what the Old Testament states, that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" [Joel 2:32]. *Salvation is meant to include everyone.* Salvation is to be

inclusive. That is why God gave his Son, so that "whosoever" might be saved [John 3:16]. That's inclusion.

And for that reason, when we come to the table on the first Sunday of each month to celebrate Holy Communion, we include everyone. Everyone is included. It is not a closed table; it is an open one. It is not the church's table; it is Christ's table. The good news of the unconditional and unrestricted love of God made flesh in Jesus Christ is for all. No one is to be excluded.

May we always be a church that understands that salvation is inclusive and work as hard as we can to include everyone who might want to participate in the life and work of our congregation. May we seek to include anyone and everyone, no matter how different they may be from us in one way or another. As a result of our salvation, let us truly be inclusive, and as my mother would add, "No matter what."