

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Remembering Names” from the “Call Stories” sermon series

Scripture: Romans 16:1-16

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of Romans, Paul is concluding his letter to the Romans and launches into various greetings to those that have served the church (27 names in total!).
- In vv. 1-2, we read, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrea, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.” Phoebe (which means “bright” or “radiant”) and is called a “deacon of the church”, which some translate as also “servant” or “helper” given her role as Paul’s emissary to deliver his letter.
- In verses. 3-5, Priscilla and Aquila are a married couple, who had been expelled, along with the other Jews, from Rome (see Acts 18:2-3). Verse 5 says, “Greet also the church in their house”, because poorer or newer synagogues and churches often met in homes before they could afford a building of their own. Verse 5 concludes with a greeting to Epaenetus, who is thought to be the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.
- The remaining verses speak of other various friends and helpers of the church: In v. 6, Mary is identified simply as someone “...who has worked very hard among you.” Verse 7 speaks of Andronicus and Junia, who were thought to be married, and were “highly respected among the apostles” by Paul, and also imprisoned with him at one time. Verses 8-9 speak of greeting Ampliatus, Urbanus and Stachys. These were common Roman names.
- Verses. 10-16 speaks of greeting several others, namely: Apelles, who was “approved in Christ” and to “greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus”, Herodion, the family of Narcissus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olympas, “and all the saints who are with them.” Verse 16 concludes with, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- Today's Scripture contains 27 names and is a part of a section we refer to as the *personal greetings* section of Paul's letters. In ancient epistles comes at the end of a letter and not the beginning. This is the longest list of names in all of Paul's letters. Paul knew these people from some of the places he had visited at a time when Jews were being expelled from Rome and scattered throughout the region.
- Posters, memorials, and monuments list names for us to know and honor.
- Onomastic (derivation-Greek): Of or belonging to naming.
- An important name listed in today's Scripture is Phoebe. Paul refers to her as a deacon of the church and supported the early church.
- A few of the names listed were royal, some were Greek and Jewish, some young and old. As you look at the collection of names in this reading you sense an emerging social network that is not based on shared ethnicity, status, or gender. In an empire that prized its own culture, station and sovereignty we see an emerging sub-culture in which all the usual distinctions between humans is irrelevant.
- We see issues with today's culture highlighting the things that we are against rather than what we are all for.
- There is a growing concern on the rise of antisemitism in our country, especially on college and university campuses. Since the terror attack against Israel on October 7, there has been a 388% increase in antisemitic hostility.
- Martin Niemoller: Lutheran pastor and early Nazi supporter who was later imprisoned for opposing Hitler's regime. He wrote "Then They Came For Me", which is engraved at the National Holocaust Museum.
- It is troubling when our grasp of history becomes so biased by our groupthink, that we cannot see our complexity. We are concerned for the people and the children of Israel and in Gaza.
- There is a deep bond that forms in a common faith! When one of us hurts, we all hurt. When one celebrates, we all do. We are connected...we are one family!
- In the names we see today, in the names we say out loud and remember, we see the saints! They who have "poked holes into the darkness".
- A saint is a sinner, who never gives up!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- Who is Phoebe? What is her position and importance to Paul's mission and the church?
- Like the names listed in these verses, how are you working hard for Christ and the church?
- Think of some examples where you have seen a list of names being presented and honored (memorial, plaque, etc.). What makes it so important and sacred? How does it honor those who are named?
- What does Rev. Dr. Chappell mean by a saint as someone who "pokes holes in the darkness"?

