### “Showing Honor” Steve Finlan for The First Church, September 3, 2023

**Romans 12:9–19**

9Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

**Matthew 20:17–19**

17While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 18“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; 19then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.”

Welcome, everyone, to First Church this Labor Day weekend. Traditionally Labor Day weekend is seen as the end of summer and the beginning of the school year. As adults, we know that life learning never ends, and taken one by one, the sayings we heard today could become lessons for daily living. Some of the lessons could be applied to Christians living in groups, while others could be taken personally, as individuals.

Hear first these words from Paul about practicing ethics and consideration in a congregation. “Let love be genuine” (12:9). It seems obvious, but it is important that we be reminded of that.

A particularly moving passage, to me, is “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (12:10). We see this sometimes, when people go out of their way to show respect for someone, possibly someone who is used to being ignored or even insulted. There is a recent video of a young fan approaching Shaquille O’Neal to hug him. A security guard escorts the boy away, but Shaquille gestures for the boy to come back, and the boy’s father takes a picture of the two. There are other instances of his generosity toward youngsters. This is a way of showing honor.

Paul has more life advice: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (12:12). Rejoice, be patient, and persevere in prayer. That is how you live devotedly. He says “Bless those who persecute you . . . do not repay anyone evil for evil” (12:14, 17), which echoes the non-violence teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where he says “love your enemies” (Matt 5:44). Occasionally one can get through to one’s enemy, and change them. The centurion who supervised the execution of Jesus had his heart changed after he observed Jesus’ demeanor throughout the whole affair, and ended up saying, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mark 15:39).

I find some more inspirational life teaching in the letter to the Romans: “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly . . . so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (12:16, 18). These are principles for living in a congregation or living in a *world*, principles that emphasize considerate and kindly behavior, starting from a basis in hope and faith: “rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (12:12).

Of course, we have Jesus as our prime example who, even though supremely tested, did not give up hope either for himself or for those around him and continued to pray for them, even promising salvation to a thief on a cross next to him.

We move from Paul’s words about spiritual living in group interaction to Jesus’ example. In this passage, Jesus warns the apostles of his coming arrest and crucifixion. He was not particularly concerned about himself, but focused on each of the apostles, as he knew the upcoming events were going to affect them. In fact, he gives a warning three times in Matthew, three times in Mark, and three times in Luke. They are matter-of-fact warnings that alert the apostles to the coming events that will pose some danger to them personally. I think he is just looking out for their good, wanting them to be mentally ready for the painful experiences that are coming. He is worried about the devastating effect that these events will have on the minds of the apostles, and he is right to worry about that.

What’s interesting is what’s *not* present in any of the nine passages. There is no atonement message, no hint that he has to die to pay for human sins, no suggestion that his death has a saving effect upon others. He talks about the coming death not in order to offer any interpretation of it or to make it central to salvation. He only mentions it to encourage the apostles to be mentally ready to face that crisis when it comes.

Jesus knows who is organizing the attack that is coming, when it will happen, what the result will be, and what the after-result will be, namely, his resurrection. The facts of Jesus’ being railroaded, arrested, abused, and killed are an inescapable part of the story of his life. But we are not obliged to accept the interpretations that became popular, asserting that his death was a payment for sin, or was willed by God. In fact, his teachings state otherwise.

His parable of the absentee landlord has the landlord sending his son to some tenant farmers in order “to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard” (Mark 12:2), not in order to get him killed. When the tenant farmers do kill the son, the landlord is angry and takes the vineyard away from these bad tenants.

The chief priests realized he “told this parable against them” (12:12), and they started plotting to get him killed. It was human jealousy and the priests’ love of power that led to the plot to get Jesus killed. It was not by God’s design. Rather, Jesus was sent to collect some produce, to gather some fruit, which was Jesus’ main metaphor for spiritual progress and good deeds, just such good deeds as are outlined in the Romans passage. Jesus is the one who really enables people to “live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18). He offers lessons to teach us to be compassionate, to recognize religious living in others, even in Gentiles and cripples, and to not be full of ourselves but to be motivated by love.

“Extend hospitality to strangers,” Paul says; “Do not be haughty” (Rom 12:13, 16). Jesus practiced these things, and can help us to practice them. Today, as students in the school of love, we can rejoice that our loving Savior, our Brother-Teacher wants us to receive the lessons he taught, to practice his example, to persist when suffering, to share loving-kindness, and to rejoice in hope, which is also faith in eventual vindication and everlasting life.

Let us produce the spiritual fruits that Jesus came to collect. Let us be true and loyal disciples. Let us show honor to each other and live peaceably with each other. We can change the world that way.