



13th Sunday after Pentecost
September 3, 2017
Romans 11:13-15, 17-24, 28-32

"Grafted"

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ, do you struggle with envy? Envy is where you look at someone else and what they have and wish that you had those things yourself. "I wish that I had that person's job, I wish that I had that person's stuff, I wish I had that person's money, I wish I had that person's house, I wish I had that person's clothes, I wish I had that person's personality, I wish I had that person's happiness, I wish I had that person's easy life, etc." Envy is wanting something someone else has. I think it's safe to say that it plagues every person – children, teenagers, adults, elderly- to some degree or another. And the result? A discontentment with life, gnawing feeling of lacking in life, a bitterness and anger. Do you struggle with envy or do people envy you?

Did you know that there is no reason for you to struggle with envy, but there's plenty of reasons for people to envy you? Why so? Last week we looked at the Old Testament church and saw God's faithfulness through centuries in keeping His promise to send a Savior into this world. Well, it's always been God's will that Jesus would be the Savior not just of the Israelites but the Savior of the world. God used a specific nation, the nation of Israel, to bring the Savior into the world, but God's intention and will was for people of all nations to be part of his kingdom. We saw it in the Old Testament as people from different nations came to faith in the God of the Israelites, trusted in God's Word, and looked forward to a Savior, like Ruth. When Jesus came He spent most of His time sharing the good news that He was the Savior to the people of Israel because they were the ones who had all the promises of God. But God's intention was always to bring the message to all people. So, when the apostle Paul went on his mission trips to various places, he usually started by going to the synagogue where his fellow Jews were. Some believed in Jesus, others rejected. When he was rejected he brought the gospel to the Gentiles or non-Jews.

And that's what Paul is describing in our lesson with this image of grafting. Grafting is when you take a branch from one tree and splice it onto the trunk of a different tree. That branch then starts receiving nutrients and sap from the trunk and becomes a branch on that tree. Jesus is that trunk, He is the vine. His fellow Israelites who rejected Him as the Savior through unbelief were cut off. Gentiles or wild olive shoots were grafted in through faith in Jesus as the Savior. And in the New Testament (which is really just a continuation of the Old Testament church), Gentiles are becoming members of God's household, children of God, recipients of all God's blessings through the free gift of faith in Jesus as their Savior. Throughout the ages Gentiles have been pouring into the church wherever the gospel is being proclaimed and becoming children of God. But in God's master plan this also serves a saving purpose. As Gentiles pour into the church and receive every spiritual blessing from God, this is to incite the Israelites to envy in the hope that they too might be grafted back into the vine through faith in Jesus.

As a father I've done something similar with my children. One child has a toy, they see the toy of their brother or sister, lose interest in their toy and only want the other one's toy. One thing you can do is take the original toy and really point out all of the different things you can do with it and it doesn't work all the time, but sometimes they rediscover the uniqueness and specialness of their original toy and want it back again.

God's master plan uses envy to bring people into His kingdom. This first applies to the Jewish people. The people God used to bring the Savior into the world. Many rejected Jesus and so were cut off, but they too can be grafted back in. I read a story about a Lutheran pastor who baptized a Jewish girl on Christmas Day, her mother and brother on Good Friday. The mother described how she had this Christian friend who always had a "sparkle" on her face when she talked about Jesus and the Jewish woman wanted that "sparkle" too. In a way she was envious.

But what about you, do people envy you? Do they envy what you have? I'm not talking about your stuff, your things, your personality, your position in life. I'm talking about what each one of you has. You have been grafted into the vine, you are a member of God's own household, you are an eternal heir of the everlasting, almighty God! In other words, you're rich! You're infinitely rich in what really matters. Do people envy you? Do they envy what you have in Christ? I saw a statistic from the 2010 census that there are over 25,000 people in Beltrami county who didn't indicate any religion at all. We live shoulder to shoulder with people who don't believe, we experience the same difficulties, struggles, problems, but do they see a difference in us, in our attitude? Is there nothing that stands out in our words and behavior? Is our language just as filled with filth and gossip? Are we just as stressed, worried, anxious, prone to anger, discontent, jealous, proud, self-centered as anyone so that on the outside there doesn't seem to be anything different about us and those who don't believe? Nothing to envy? God's NT mission plan is to use us to make unbelievers envious of what we have from Him. Why so? Because He wants them to come to faith too. But if we fall into the same sins and blend in with the unbelieving world—there's nothing positively attracting about that. But why? Why would we not live differently from the sinful world? Isn't it pride? Isn't it an attitude of, "I'm in, I'm good. I can live however."

Notice what God says here, "Don't be arrogant, but tremble. If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either." Pride comes before the fall. Might we, too, be cut off if we keep sinning? The antidote to such pride and arrogance is God's mercy. The only reason I'm here, the only reason you're here, the only reason you and I are part of God's eternal kingdom is the mercy and grace of God. We certainly don't deserve it. But "God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." No one deserves anything from God, we're all disobedient. No one can walk up to God and expect a paycheck, we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But in mercy God graced us with full and free forgiveness in Jesus who paid for all sins with His life, death, and resurrection. There but for the grace of God go I.

But God's mercy has the further purpose of igniting our hearts to share God's mercy with any and all. That's God's plan for us NT Christians: that we bring the light of the gospel to others. No person should be regarded by us as hopelessly lost and beyond God's grace, who knows how God may graft them into His vine? God uses us to incite envy in those who don't have the hope that we have.

How do we make the gospel envious to others? How do we live with hope? How do we live as the salt and light of the world? It's being reminded again and again what we have in Jesus. In Jesus you have eternal peace with God, everything is right with God. That means you have a peace that transcends understanding in the face of hurricanes and hate crimes, in the face of death and disasters, you have peace. Did you know that in Jesus you already, right now, are an heir of eternal life? That because of Jesus you'll live in the riches of heaven forever? You know what having that does? It gives you contentment. What an incredible blessing! You don't have to chase after the latest and greatest stuff, accumulate, try to get more and more, try to get ahead, in Jesus you have all you need for eternal life, you have contentment. Did you know that because Jesus died and rose for you that you have a undeflatable joy in any and every circumstance? A joy in good and bad times. Do you know how wonderful that is? You have purpose and meaning and identity, many don't have that. You can be patient, kind, caring, and self-controlled. Why so? You know you're forgiven. You know how rich you are in Jesus. You get to partake of the priceless body and blood of Jesus along with bread and wine in the life-giving Supper!

You have every spiritual blessing in Christ. You've been grafted into God's eternal kingdom. God has mercifully made you rich in every way. Live as the redeemed, forgiven, blessed child of God you are. Lead those around you to be envious of what is yours in Christ so as to share the eternal treasure with them. Amen.