

10:30am Communion Service
 With Ben Midgley & Jon Edwards

Communion and
 Community
 Romans 16: 1 - 16

02/11/25



One thing I love about communion is that you can't download it. It's a physical thing where you have to get round the table and you have to eat the bread and drink the wine as a community event. Communion brings God's people together. It's a privilege and a joy to see God's people here together this morning.

After reading Romans 16 and working my way through it, I turned to my 1,000-page commentary on the 16 chapters of Romans expecting each chapter to take up about a 16th of the book and each half chapter about a 'thirty-tooth' or thirty odd pages. There were only four pages on chapter 16! The commentary said that this chapter is perhaps 'the least edifying or encouraging of the book of Romans. This list of names may not interest the common reader unless he is a kind of nerd who is interested in the socio-economic profile of the early church.' Years ago I went to the Oberammergau Passion Play in Austria. It's an operatic presentation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, covering his trial, suffering, and death performed in the open air with the mountains as its backdrop where thunderstorms are quite common in the afternoon. As Judas was pouring out his grief over his betrayal of Christ an enormous crack of thunder ripped through his aria in sympathy with the unfolding intensity of the drama. As you read through Romans and all the incredible expositions of doctrine with the implications of Jesus' finished work on the cross and how it maps onto the ordinary life of every sinner, you get to the end and there are the people! This is the thunder of the gospel. Christ really did die on the cross. He really came back to life. But it remains a matter of indifference to you until it changes your life. The whole point of it all is that our lives get changed. In the end it is about people. It is wonderful to have theology and doctrine but it is not the doctrines we hold but the doctrines that hold us that matter and how our lives are changed by believing in Jesus the Christ. Here in this chapter are the people who have been living out all the things Paul has been writing about. The glory of God is manifest in the lives that we go on to live; the relationships between us. These 27 women and men named here along with their house-holds and other groups were co-workers working together for the glory of God and the gospel. They are in fact the Church. At first Paul gives details of individuals and ends with a general "and all the Lord's people who are with them". We may not know everyone at church or a lot about them but they all are in Christ and 'loved by God'. (Rom 1:7) The same affection God has for his Son he has for them. They are in Christ as sons and daughters of the living God, holy and just. The great doctrine of this book is Habakkuk 2:4 "The just shall live by faith" (2:17). Then Paul expounds what it is to be 'just' and the importance and necessity of faith; what it is to be in Christ; to be a believer. All these people belong on the simple basis that they believe. Their sense of belonging does not rest on what they do but on whom they have

believed. They belong to God as his special possession and as such they belong to his church that he sustains and encourages.

Paul uses the word 'Greet' sixteen times. It is a specific instruction to greet those who are in Christ in the sense of receiving them, accepting and welcoming them (v2) even though they may not know them yet. It's like giving them a reference so they will welcome them and show them affection. They are to greet each other with a holy kiss. Kisses are the reserve of family. Make sure they know that you love them and recognize that the one you kiss is holy too. That makes it a holy kiss. You are both in Christ. Welcome them because of the one on whom we both believe.

This is an incredible group of faithful friends because of their works of service to each other. They have truly become a family of blood relatives through the is not their own. The Roman church demonstrate that they are in Christ by the way that they live and by the way they welcome this list of people into their fellowship. The church in Rome is being asked to short-circuit all the steps of friendship-building in a moment and welcome them simply because they believe so they can eat and share together, serving together as one as James demonstrates when he writes that he will show his faith by his works. (James 2:14-26)

Curiously, here are very few Latin names in this list. They are almost all Greek names with one Hebrew name and one Persian name. Three of the five people with Latin names are Jews as are some of the people with Greek names. They are a very racially and socially mixed group. A lot of them have slave names and others are associated with great wealth and connectedness. At that moment Rome had become isolated from the rest of the Christian world. See that the glory of God is manifest in the church by its incredible diversity. (Eph 2:14-22) The Lord's table is a place for all sorts of people with different backgrounds but with the same need; everyone single one a sinner who has discovered salvation through faith and by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We all have this great need in common. Can you please God in and of yourself? Can you open Heaven's gates on your own? Are you good enough? If you are not, see Jesus Christ in all his beauty, power and glory. See how he shed his own precious blood for your sake that the penalty that you should have borne he brought upon himself. Believe on him and trust that your entry has been secured by his finished work.

So, receive each other. Accept each other. Greet each other. Welcome each other. Kiss each other with a holy kiss. Show by your affection one for each other that you believe that Christ is enough to find full and free acceptance in his body and by nothing else. Do all of your work, all of your service and risk-taking, all your suffering, and the building up of your friendships and family relationships that build up in church life around this precious table as it is shared through time around the world bringing all manner of people together in Christ.