

PENTECOST 14 YEAR A  
EZEKIEL 33:7-11  
ROMANS 13:8-14  
MATTHEW 18:15-20  
SEPTEMBER 9, 10, 2017

In these past couple of weeks our neighbors to the south have experienced hurricanes and warnings of hurricanes to come. Hurricane Harvey claimed several lives and billions of dollars in property damage. The rest of us have experienced a ripple effect of that hurricane as we think about family and friends that might have been in the path of the storms but also in the rising gasoline prices that resulted from refineries being closed down.

This week we are hearing about Hurricane Irma that has already impacted the lives of many in the Caribbean and now threatens to do much damage in Florida and points to the north and east. I listened to the news reports as the reporters told about the likely path of Irma. I thought about many of your family members living in the path of the storm as we as my father-in-law living near Orlando. Our prayers continue to be with those in the south as they seek to recover from the hurricanes. We ask God's blessing and peace for those families as they endure the storm and then move onto clean up and rebuilding tasks.

**Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.**

In the verses that come before these from Romans 13 Paul teaches that we honor those in government and pay taxes when they are due. His message is one of good order and of doing the right things. In these verses from Romans 13 Paul teaches about owing nothing but love. We love God and we love one another. Paul would say that if we truly love each other we would also love God. When Paul speaks of love fulfilling the law he is saying that the Ten Commandments are important parts of

our lives of faith. Keeping the law is our response to faith. We have been blessed with the life our Lord gives. God sent Jesus to die on a cross that we would experience the forgiveness of sin and have life. The gospel says that Christ died for us even while we were still sinners. God sent the Son because we could not achieve our own salvation. Grace says that I am a child of God. I have been accepted into the Lord's family even though I do not deserve it and even though I cannot do it myself.

It is implied that Paul values all of the commandments but Paul lifts four of the Ten Commandments for us to read. Adultery, murder, stealing and covetousness are lifted for the Romans to consider. In that time those particular issues were prevalent. Paul raises these commandments so that Christians would understand that breaking these commandments does not demonstrate love for neighbor. Breaking those commandments eventually destroys families as well as communities. Jesus taught in Matthew 18 that the family and the community are lifted up. When Jesus gave his teaching about church discipline he is saying the church must deal with conflicts quickly and effectively. Church families struggle with a variety of issues that threaten to tear it apart. The church is made up of people that sometimes get it wrong. We sometimes fail to love as God calls us to love. Jesus gives the teaching so that the church knows how to come to reconciliation. The church family is like every family in that there are conflicts. Jesus does not want the church to be divided but united. Paul says that we owe nothing but love. Jesus says that we love the community enough to work through the differences of opinion that are sure to happen.

**Romans 13:11, 12** Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup>the night is far gone, the day is near.

Paul talks of love in the context of time. We are to love others because God loved us but Paul also says that we “**know the time.**” Paul uses the symbols of night and day, darkness and light, and sleep and waking up. We usually go to bed at night when it is dark. The coming of light indicates the passing of night and the beginning of a new day. The coming of the dawn is an indication that it is time to wake up, get up, and get about the deeds of the new day.

Before Hurricane Harvey hit the south many warned the residents to wake up and prepare themselves for the storm. They were warned that this would cause destruction and the possibility of the loss of life. The time came for the people to respond to the warnings. The call was to wake up to action that needed to be taken. The same warnings are being sounded as Hurricane Irma approaches Florida and other areas. Those in Florida are told to flee before the coming of the storm. They are warned to prepare themselves for what is coming.

Time is also viewed in a second way. Paul says that too much time has been wasted and that time was passing the Romans by. The time they have left to prepare for the Lord’s coming is slowly passing by. The Roman Christians must be quick to love their neighbor and love the Lord their God. Paul says the time left between the day of their initial salvation and the day of their final salvation is diminishing. The same is true for us. There is less time to serve the Lord now than there was when we were first came to believe. There is no time to waste!

These past days have caused many to wonder if the second coming of Christ is upon us. There are hurricanes piled up in the Atlantic and great earthquakes in Mexico. I don’t know that this means the Lord is coming for his church but it reminds us to be aware and prepared because the day will come at a time we least expect it.

Paul reminds us of our initial salvation and of the coming day of our full salvation to stir us up to love and good deeds. Our focus is not only to be on others, but also on the Lord. We remember and proclaim God's grace. We remember the gospel that proclaims our salvation. We might even use this time to know that the Lord is coming again. This will mean glory for us and rewards for faithfulness. We must not waste this time, but rather serve God faithfully and so be faithful when He returns. We put on the Lord Jesus Christ

When we put on the Lord Jesus Christ we will give witness to him through our lives. We will share his love. *Putting on Christ means depending on Christ to live his life, his grace, and his love through us by means of his Spirit.* God has provided for us that which we lack. We must walk in the Spirit, by faith. We walk in the ways of the Lord and we give witness to God. Owe no one anything except to love them. AMEN