

Being accepted Romans 15, 4-13 Sermon on 3. Sunday in Advent



*4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. 5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name." 10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." 12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

At Christmas time we will once again rack our brains over which present to buy for whom. No one should be left out in the family and presents should not give rise to conflicts. For example, one child should not receive more than the other child, so that the Christmas spirit is not destroyed by arguments among the kids. At Christmas we will also have to practice accepting presents from others. Accepting presents can sometimes be more difficult than giving. For example, when I don't have a present for the other person. Or when the present is very valuable and I am ashamed to accept it. We already notice that giving presents is very closely linked to our mutual relationships. If I am in a good relationship, then the risk is smaller that a present will be misunderstood or that jealousy will arise. The fact is, however, that even in the best relationships mistakes, misunderstandings and bitterness can arise. Such things could arise especially around the Christmas tree. In the midst of this time of giving and taking, Paul trumpets a very different kind of giving. We should give ourselves a Christmas present by accepting others as they are:

"Accept one another as Christ accepted you."

There is a reason why Paul has to speak so clearly about mutual acceptance. The reason was that mutual acceptance had become a real problem and the relationship in the community had become difficult as a result. Most of the time, the disputes took place between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians saw themselves as God's children. They knew that they were accepted by God. Just as was confirmed countless times in the Old Testament. And then Christ came and determined that his death would open heaven not only

for Jews, but also for Gentiles. Gentiles were also allowed into the sanctuary through Christ's one-time sacrifice. They were therefore children of God and accepted by God just like Jews. This was a great challenge for the Jews. Even Paul, as a trained rabbi, must have had a big problem with this. And as you can read in the Bible, Peter had to go through a tough school of faith before he finally accepted that the Gentile Christians were just as much children of God as the Jewish Christians. But what moved these people to accept each other was only one thing: Christ himself. From Christ's perspective, it was clear to both Jews and Gentiles that Christ comes to sinners to heal them. Both Jews and Gentiles are trapped in sin and corrupted. Both Jews and Christians need salvation. And it was this salvation in Christ alone that made them one. Christ did not come into the world because he found people so nice and therefore wanted to get to know them personally. No, he came precisely because the world was broken and corrupted.

Just imagine the following story. One day in heaven, God the Father came to Jesus and said to him: "I have a surprise for you. A gift! The gift should be both a Christmas present and a birthday present." And the Father continued this thought experiment and said: "I'm giving you mankind!" Then Jesus looked down on the world, saw all the wars, the hatred, the bitterness and the strife among people and said: "I don't want that! It's broken!" No, that's not how it happened. Jesus didn't come into the world because it was good, but precisely because it was broken. It was precisely because people couldn't save themselves from the mess that Jesus came. It was precisely because we couldn't reconcile ourselves that Jesus came to reconcile us. Among the first Christians, both Jews and Gentile Christians were under the powerful impression of this Lord Jesus Christ, who found this long way to save us. And for this reason Paul says in our passage: "Accept one another as Christ accepted you." Because accepting one another has become a trivial matter today, most people think that accepting one another is possible without Jesus. With the apostle Paul it is quite different. Christ is not only a model for us, but his long journey to us humans is the source, origin and reason for our acceptance of one another.

In the Christian church, all major problems have only one cause! That is that we no longer have Christ in the center. As soon as we Christians no longer have Jesus at the center, Satan is more than quick enough to put all sorts of other things at the center instead of Christ. Then, petty matters and arguments often take the place that belongs to Christ alone. Yes, in the Christian community we are first and foremost not German, not Iranian, not Afghan, not American not rich and not poor. The first thing that always comes first is that we are Christians and are accepted by God. That is why Paul wants to turn our attention entirely to Christ! Instead of just falling into morality and telling people: "Just accept one another!" Paul understands the whole thing from the origin and nature of Christianity. We humans cannot simply forget or ignore our different influences. That is not expected of us either. We just see these differences from a different perspective. We see them from Christ's perspective. As soon as he is at the center, we can also solve all other problems among us. Today is the third Advent. Advent can be translated as COMING. This means that Christ COMES to us

humans. Christ, who is equal to God, did not shy away from accepting people and becoming a human being. Jesus proved the same thing again and again during his life on earth. He accepted people just as they are! Yes, this word acceptance is very important on Jesus' agenda. This started at Jesus' birth, when he accepted the poor circumstances of Joseph and Mary and had himself laid in a manger. When Jesus met sinners, he did the same. Jesus does not reject sinners, but accepts them. His goal is always to seek and find what is lost. We Christians can all write this fact with a large font on our foreheads. I am one of those children! Jesus found me! I am therefore accepted! I am a child of God! Through baptism I was given the name Christian. This is why I now belong to God's family. And I am always embraced by God himself. Even if I sometimes do a lot of stupid things. My value in Christ always remains the same. My brother and sister's value in Christ also remains the same. Christ is always very important and first in my life and in the life of my brother and sister. That is our value and nothing else. Of course it happens again and again in our lives that we suffer and are hurt by the many challenges in life. Of course it also happens that we have differences and argue with each other. But our value in Christ always remains the same. Here is a parable. I am holding a 10 euro note here. It says the value on it! The note is worth 10 euros! There is no getting around that. If I crumple this note, trample on it on or even throw it in the water, the value of the note remains the same. It is worth 10 euros. It is the same with us Christians. When we are baptized, we are Christians. That is our value. Sometimes we are crushed in an unrecognizable ball, just like I just did with the 10 euro note, so that the Christ in me can no longer be recognized at all. And yet our heavenly Father always recognizes the value that I have. He helps us with great patience and love so that we can regain the value that we really have. We have our value through Christ. Through Christ we are God's children and belong to his family. We can also recognize this value in the Christian community. I see that I am not the only person in the community of Christians. Others are also baptized. Some are from a completely different culture. Others may be in a crisis at the moment. There are always people who have fallen into sin and you can't really tell whether they are Christians or not. Paul wants to encourage us to look to Christ. Christ does not reject people. He does not do this because he can recognize people's value. Jesus did not abandon the festering and stinking sick person, but took his smell and his misery into his own arms. The sinner caught fresh in the act could have aroused disgust and revulsion. Jesus had more than enough reasons to have such an attitude. And yet He does not do it. He accepts the sinner! Jesus also accepted the lousy tax collector who plunged so many people into misery through his greed. Just as Jesus takes me in his arms, I can pass on the love that I have received from Jesus. Again and again. "Accept one another as Christ accepted you," Paul tells us. Just as Jesus takes me in his arms, I can pass on the love that I have received from Jesus to others. Again and again. "Accept one another as Christ accepted you," Paul tells us. That is what Jesus did. That is what Christian generations have done again and again up to the present day. That is what we will do too. And a miracle will happen. We look up to God and sing a hymn of praise and the angels sing along! It is Advent! Amen.