

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 27, 2017

Text: Romans 11:33-12:8

Theme: “Really Deep!”

Well—that can be a deep subject as the old joke goes. Holes drilled in the earth can go to great depths. I mentioned this in a message last December the extreme example of the Kola Borehole drilled in the days of the Soviet Union. It goes 7.5 miles down into the earth. They had to stop as the temperature at that depth was too hot for their drilling equipment. Another deep hole was that made by Deepwater Horizon Exxon platform (the infamous Deepwater Horizon). It drilled five miles down from the floor of Gulf of Mexico.

If something is down a well it may well be out of reach. I have a couple of wells with me. Well, not really, just 4 inch pipe. Maybe I could sell them as predrilled wells or post holes. Something at the bottom of this one is out of reach, even more so with this one (7.5 feet long).

Our text today is about something much deeper. “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.” (vs 33) How deep the ways of God? Unsearchable are His judgments and inscrutable His ways. We could translate this unfathomable (*avnexerau, nhtoj*, *anexerauntetos*, so deep you can never get to the bottom) His judgments and untrackable (*avnexicni, astoj*, *annexationist's*--you just won't figure it out, ever) His ways. Deep, really deep can bring fear.

The depths of the sea have always been a fearful image. Just recently the wreck of the USS Indianapolis from WWII was found in the Pacific. That wreck is about 18,000 feet below the surface of the water. That's about half the depth of the deepest place in the seas. The Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench is down 36,070 feet. That's really deep. Yes, falling down into the depths is no comforting thought. Falling into the well used to be a fear, not like one of these, but that hand dug stone lined wells. Children stories have been written of falling in and of long winded rescue. It is not a gleeful experience, no, it's one that may be out of reach, beyond rescue.

So you take the depths, a body, and add a stone or rock to boot, even fastened to a boot, and you have death on your hands, drowning. Jesus' disciples had a healthy fear of death in the depths. When a storm unexpectedly came up on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was asleep in the boat they cried out, "Save us, Lord; for we are perishing." (Matthew 8:24, 25) Attach a weight, like a cinder block or two, toss in the water and you have a scene from a mobster movie. Jesus says in Matthew 18:6, "It would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

That's frightening and that would be better than what? Well, better to suffer that than to cause of the little ones who believes in Jesus to fall into sin. Better to suffer a horrible death than cause spiritual harm, better to suffer that than to fall into the depths of God's justice. For the full depths of His justice means

the outside, outside in the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is down in the depths where there is no one to pull you out. It's plop, but no second plop or fizz, fizz, no such thing as a relief there is. Depths of justice, weight of justice and the waters of the abyss, a damnable combination.

Yet out of the depths comes rescue and life, the depths of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. This is the good news that Paul is proud to proclaim here in Romans. We saw last week how we were all locked up by the law, all guilty, all deserving to be thrown into the depths—no distinction, so for Jew and Gentile alike. But the glory of the Gospel, not ashamed, Paul says, for it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, first for the Jew, then for the Greek. God has been at work to rescue. He does work for the good of those He calls. He used the rejection by the Jews to bring the message to the Gentiles. And then Paul says, He will use the belief by the Gentiles to arouse the Jews to look again. Why drown in their sins when the long waited Savior is right there?

Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge. From those depths comes the foolishness of the cross. Paul says we are justified by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith." (Romans 3:24, 25). Paul says in 1 Corinthians that we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). Yes, a stumbling block for the Jews. He is the stone rejected; the rejection leads to the cross. Then the scandal of His dying that accursed death of

hanging on the tree. How could this be the promised one? And for the Greeks the idea of the divine coming to die for the mortal was such a foolish idea. Yet Paul writes, to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:24, 25).

“Totality” was a word you heard a time or two this past week. Christ is totality, total God and man, total humility, the totality of God’s mercy and grace flowing from the totality of His great love. In Him we have the riches of forgiveness and with the forgiveness the riches of the inheritance of the saints. In Him we experienced a good drowning. We were buried with Him by baptism into death so that just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4) The old self was crucified with Him in order that we might be set free from sin (6:8) Jesus is the rock of our salvation, This is knowledge too deep for us to know. It must be revealed. In our Gospel lesson Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and Jesus responds, “Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven.” Jesus also told Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock (confession that Jesus is the Christ), I will build my church and the gates (all the forces) of hell shall not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) The church is entrusted with the good news of forgiveness, the conveying of forgiveness that frees from the depths of sin.

Jesus is the Rock of Refuge. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus the cornerstone (Ephesians 6:20).

Something amazing has happened. Out of the depths a drowning to life, that life being on the Rock and that life found in the body. Actually from the water there are bodies and the body. We'll do the bodies first. Paul calls us to present our bodies a sacrifice, living, holy and acceptable to God (12:1). We have been given life to serve our neighbor and to honor God. Holy and acceptable will be according to His commandments. Paul says this is our "spiritual" worship, though it could be translated "reasonable" (λογικῆς, logiken) worship. It is reasonable, logical, that which flows from being a new creation in Christ.

We walk in this service, this worship, as those not conformed by the outside but transformed from the inside. We battle against being shaped by world around us, that neither holy nor acceptable to God. No, the pressure of the world from within would like to shape us along the pattern of self-interest and desires of the flesh on the inside. Paul exhorts us to be transformed from the inside by the renewal of the mind. Such a renewed mind is that like that of Christ Jesus, a mind of service, not one of rivalry or conceit, no, one of humility. Such a mind tests the will of God, not to put to the test, but seeks to know it better in His Word. Such a renewed mind does not think of itself more highly than it ought, but according to sound thinking, one that comes from the measure of faith God has given. Such a mind remembers the depth of sin and the need for forgiveness, such a mind does not exalt itself to the position of determiner of

righteousness and continues to receive that cleansing of Christ through faith.

Such bodies worship God in deed and in truth not in isolation but as part of a larger body, the body of Christ. Yes we do present our bodies as living body parts of the body. Our bodies were made for that body. We have been given different gifts to be used for the good of that body. We often get this turned on the head. We live as though the body of Christ were a feeding station for us to come and go at will. We flutter around sucking out the nectar as we feel the need, then fly off to do our own thing. That's like an arm or a leg plugging into the body for a blood fix, and then detaching to walk or swing on its own. Isn't that a odd picture? So why do we try it?

No, as believers, we offer our bodies, living and acceptable to God as living body parts in the body. Yes, there are different parts, given different gifts to be joined to gather together to make up the whole. Paul lists seven different gifts in this section of Roman. It's not meant to be an exhaustive list of gifts, but the fact that there seven may remind us that what God gives will be complete for the needs and the work. Those seven are prophesy, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, leading, and doing acts of mercy. All of these find expression in transformation, not conformation. As that happens we see the building of the body.

There are more depths of God to be experienced. The days of the body are not over. The church is still being build and the gates of hell have not and will not overcome. For those in the body it will not be the depths

of hell, no, the depths of glory. It will not be the depths of despair, but the depths of meaning. It will not be the depths of defeat, but the heights of victory.

Oh the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. We will not plunge all those depths. They are unfathomable and untrackable. Praise be for His revealing from the depths His message of forgiveness and life. For Jesus' sake. Amen