

Going Over the List

****In memory of Fred Craddock****

Romans 16: 1-16

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

It is the time of year when we find ourselves on people's lists. Non-profit organizations are asking for donations. Volunteers for certain candidates call us to squeeze out our vote. In church we have Time and Talent lists we ask you to fill out. After worship, the Elder/Deacon Nominating Committee will dust off their directory and put together a list of names who they believe the Spirit is calling to help lead the church. I know, I know, some lists we would prefer not to be on. But then there are other lists we don't mind belonging to: it is nice to be on someone's Christmas card list. Or getting a tiny note in the mail reminding us that we are on someone's prayer list. Being on a list means we are remembered.

At the end of his letter, St. Paul compiles a list of people he remembers. Have you ever read over the list of these names before? It's not very exciting. Just twenty-six hard to pronounce names on a list. But if we look at the names, I suppose we could get a glimpse of the sociological profile of the early church. There's a husband and a wife, Prisca and Aquila. There's a single woman, Mary; and a single man, Herodian. There are sisters, Tryphaena and Tryphosa—twins: one had dimples, but I bet they were still hard to tell apart. There are

brothers Andronicus and Junia. There's Rufus and his mother. There's Nereus and his sister. Don't worry there won't be a quiz at the end of this. It's a multicultural group: some have Greek names, some Latin, a few have Jewish names. It's a multi-economic group: some names denote a person with privilege, others seem to be middle class. Many are common names given to slaves. It's an interesting list...sort of. But it's a list of the people who St. Paul carries with him in his heart.

Who is on your list? Who are the people who helped form who you are? Who helped open your eyes to the presence of God? Who walked with you through life's dark moments? Could be someone living or dead. Could be someone inside or outside of the church. [Take a moment and write down a few names of people in your bulletins who are on your list.]

Every year, around this time, I go sifting through the binders of memories in our church library. Some of the names I know, others I don't. In one of the binders are letters from our 50th Anniversary where older members are reflecting on Trinity. There is a letter from Vi Brady. She says she clicked with Trinity people right away and you became her closest friends. She says, you walked with her through her "darkest hours." I bet some of you here today are on her list. Then there is Kristy Rolison. I didn't know her like some of you knew her, but I had the honor of visiting her during her final days. She attended Trinity for years until she became a minister herself. She was a gifted preacher who told me that she just wanted to write one last sermon. I asked her what she would preach about. Of course, she didn't know in the moment. She went on to share that she was no longer afraid of death. She said, "Yesterday I was afraid, but today I'm not." I asked her what had changed over the last twelve hours? She said, "I am now certain to whom I belong." I responded, "Kristy, I believe that is a perfect final sermon." Today we remember others on our list: Bob Pursley and Anne Maddrey and others, whose love formed us. Who is on your list? Who are the saints—living or gone—that you remember?

Of course, the truth is that it is so much more than a list. To an outsider it looks like a bunch of names, but we know it is so much more. Have you ever visited the memorial wall in Washington D.C.? You might see an old woman placing flowers beneath a name. You might see a relative take a blank sheet of paper and with a pencil begin to shade in their loved one's name. You may even see a mother picking up her daughter and have her child touch her little hand to the etching of a name. It's so much more than a list.

Last week some of us went to the vigil at Temple Emanuel. The rabbi read off eleven names. Eleven more names to add to the long list of lives claimed by violence and hatred. Some of those sitting in the congregation knew some of those names and loved

them. Then standing next to me was a young African American man who was wearing a T-shirt with a list of names on it: Trayvon, Freddie, Sandra, Tamir, Alton, Philando. All names of young unarmed black men and women who were killed. It looks like a list, it sounds like a list, but it is so much more than a list!

So at the end of St. Paul's letter he does what all pastors do if they are wise: he stops arguing his theological convictions and begins to remember his people:

"Say hello to Phoebe! If you think anything of my sermons, you need to make sure you listen to this woman of God preach! You won't be disappointed!"

"Say hello to Prisca and Aquila. You know, they dared to vouch for me when no one else would."

"Say hello to Epaenetus, my first convert who asked to be baptized because the gospel got inside of him and wouldn't let him go. I couldn't sleep that night because I was so grateful that God had used me."

"Say hello to the brothers, Andronicus and Junia. They were arrested with me and charged with political activism. We sang hymns all night long [*singing*] "We Shall Overcome" and eventually the other prisoners joined in. It drove the prison guards nuts."

We hear the good memories spill out as if Paul is flipping through an old church photo album. And it is in this part of the letter when something special happens. You see, it is here Paul uses a word he hasn't used in the first fifteen chapters. Oh, he talks about the nature of sin and grace; and being justified by faith *ad nauseam*. He drops Old Testament names like Adam and Abraham and how Christ fulfills God's promises since the beginning of time. He argues that the Gentiles are now part of the movement, because God is God, and, well, God can do whatever God wants. And finally, after fifteen big league theologically dense chapters, St. Paul speaks another word: *ecclesia*. It means "church." You know, I bet he saves *ecclesia* for the end because he knows the church is not simply a list of theological doctrines. He knows the church is not about a building or its programs or its budget. The church is about its people who come together to share their lives to help transform the world in the name of love.

You see, God has a list too. Carol read it not too long ago: Blessed are the poor, the meek, the mourning. And blessed are those who remember those who the world so easily forgets—who are merciful and peacemakers and thirst for justice. Well, don't you know: that's you! You're on the list!

When God desired a group of people to help the church be the church in such a time as ours, your name is on God's list!

When God dreamed of a place where every person would be treated as a person, where the poor would be just as valuable as the rich, where the gifts of young children and longtime members were cherished together, your name was on God's list! When God thought of who might shine a light into the darkest corners, who could wield the strength to stand against xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism and racism, do you know whose name is on the list? *Ecclesia. The Church.*

So take another look at the names you wrote down. Think of what it is about them that makes you remember. Then, if they are still living, pick up the phone and let them know they are on your list. You can tell them your pastor made you do it. It's so much more than a list. It's the flesh and blood lives of the saints who inspire us to be the church in the world. Thanks be to God for them. Thanks be to God for you.