

**The Honored**  
**August 31, 2011**  
**Romans 12:9-21**

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This was my week to provide special music and some how it turned into a major ordeal for me. I couldn't find one song I wanted to sing. I looked through every hymn book and song book I own – I even went to the music store to find something new – and nothing. What complicated things for me is that I wanted to sing a song that echoed the theme of our scripture reading for today. Sounds simple enough doesn't it? You would think that a song about loving each other as God loves us would be a piece of cake. Think again. Our own hymn book is a prime example. Song after song is about "me" and "I." I'm so glad Jesus save ME. Jesus loves ME this I know. Precious Lord, Take MY hand. And he walks with ME and he talks with ME. Rock of ages cleft for ME. Blessed assurance Jesus is MINE. I'll fly away! Victory is Jesus, MY savior forever. Love lifted ME. We have an abundance of songs that either thank God for saving ME or going to heaven when I die but just a handful on how we are called to treat one another.

Of course there are those grand hymns of praise, like Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee or A Mighty Fortress is Our God...but no mention of how we are called to love each other.

Don't you find it odd? Time and time again we have Jesus telling us, commanding us even, that we are to love each other – and not just each other – but all. Paul goes on to say our love must be genuine – we have to mean it. It cannot be just a means to an end but the real stuff. Yet for some strange reason our hymnals silent on the matter.

I don't know when it happened or how it happened but at some point it seems that the church got off course. If you read the words to many of our beloved hymns you might get the idea that being Christian is only about going to heaven when you die or celebrating our personal salvation. But is that what it is all about?

Yesterday several of us attended our Region's annual school for congregational learners. Sincere and caring individuals from congregations far and near were gathered together to learn something or anything that might positively impact our congregations. I have to tell you, when I looked around the room I saw a lot of bewildered people. I saw people

scratching their heads wondering why their churches are dying and how they can turn them around. I heard people sharing stories of big church fights about what time they worship and whether or not drums belong in church. The question of the day seemed to be “how do you get folks to change?” Followed by the second question “change to what?”

Our keynote speaker tried to shed some light on how we need to return to our calling as church. He said we need to “RE-church” and he used words that begin with the letters “r” and “e.” The first word he threw out was relationship. The church needs to focus on our relationships with each other rather than doctrines and creeds. It has to be relevant. It has to be about the here and now – for the living – instead of where you go when you die. It needs to be a place of renewal – a safe space to filter and process all the information we are bombarded with each day. He went on to talk about how many have been hurt by religion – by doctrines, and teachings, and practices that condemn and exclude. We have to respect each other – with our language and our action. And finally it is about revolution – which was his word for social action and volunteerism. (Relational, relevant, renewal, reconciling, respect, revolution. He concluded his speech by saying, “The church of ‘come and see’ is gone. The church of ‘go and do’ is here.”

It was a good, solid, message and I thought it was right on - especially in light of my reading of Paul this week in the Book of Romans. So he sat down and there was silence in the sanctuary as a young man stepped up to the microphone and sang a beautiful song thanking Jesus for saving ME. I know I wasn’t the only one who recognized the huge disconnect between the song and the message.

This experience just reinforced for me the fact that much of the music we sing in church, even though it is loved and sentimental, is not reflective of the church we are called to be. This experience also painfully reminded me of the fact that I still had not picked a song for special music today.

I read our passage for today. I scoured our hymnal one more time. Nothing. When I reached out my hands in frustration, you’ll never guess who grabbed them – Glen Campbell. That’s right, the great crooner of the 70’s, Glen Campbell. I learned at Glen Campbell song at camp...and I never forgot. It’s called: “A Little Less of Me.”

<sing song>

Paul never talked about buildings and budgets and programs and by-laws and membership...he talked about how we are called to live out our faith in community. He wrote letter after letter on how we are to treat one another. He wrote letters to teach us how to be the church not just come to church. He talked about setting aside all selfishness and pettiness and living a life of love and service. And that happens when we have a little less of ME and a whole lot more of WE.

And WE are called to be a community that not only looks like Jesus but continues the ministry of Jesus! Not only are we called to love and honor each other we are called to bless those who persecute us. We are called to share each others joy and not run away from each other’s sorrow. We are called to live in harmony – not dissonance. We are

called to stop looking down our noses at others and associate with those others cast off and throw away. We are called to live peaceably with each other. And the real kicker – the thing that really sets us apart from other clubs and organizations – we are instructed to practice forgiveness and have compassion on our enemies.

It is not easy to be that kind of church – it takes effort and discipline – and maybe that’s why it is easier to sing those old familiar hymns about flying off to heaven.

When I woke up yesterday morning the last thing I wanted to do was spend a glorious Saturday sitting in a church. I stomped around the house. I was crabby. When I got to the church I sat in the back row with my arms folded. I didn’t like the music. I had already decided that the day was going to be a waste. So I pulled out the notes for my sermon. If I wasn’t interested I could at least get a little work done. That’s when Paul smacked me in the face – I read our scripture again for the umpteenth time and I realized how selfish I was being.

It’s not about ME – it’s about WE. I lifted up my head, put away my notes, unfolded my arms and started looking around. I started to see the faces of sincere folks who love Jesus and care about their congregations. I tried to honor those around me with my thoughts. I started opening myself up to the possibility that I might just have more to learn. I started to listen and participate. I turned off that critical voice in my head and stopped griping because things didn’t suit my tastes.

Sometimes we need a little attitude adjustment – we need someone like Paul or Glen to get us back on track. We need to uncross our arms, stop digging in our heels, stifle our impulse to criticize and open ourselves up to what others need.

This is our fourth and last Sunday to emphasize hospitality...and hospitality is about thinking a little more of others and a little less of me.

Amen.

## **Less of Me – Glen Campbell**

Let me (G) be a little (C) kinder,  
Let me (G) be a little (D) blinder,  
To the (C) faults of those around me,  
Let me praise a little (C) more.  
Let me (G) be when I am (C) weary,  
Just a (G) little bit more (D) cheery,  
Think a (C) little more of others,  
And a (D) little less of (G) me. (C) (G)  
Let me be a little braver,  
When temptation bids me waver.  
Let me strive a little harder,  
To be all that I should be.  
And let me be a little meeker,  
With a brother that is weaker.  
Let me think more of my neighbor,  
And a little less of me.  
Let me be when I am weary,  
Just a little bit more cheery,  
Let me serve a little better,  
Those that I am striving for.  
Let me be a little meeker,  
With a brother that is weaker,  
Think a little more of others,  
And a little less of me.  
Yes, let me (G) be a little (C) meeker,  
With a (G) brother that is (D) weaker,  
Think a (C) little more of others,  
And a (D) little less of (C) me. (G)