

*Where Two or Three are Gathered*

Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18

Whitefish UMC

September 7, 2008

- † As we gathered at the station Wednesday night to head to Seattle on the train, I noticed that each of us had grabbed what was most important to bring along. We didn't have much room or much time. And we didn't know what we would face when we got there.
- † Without communicating about what to take ahead of time, many of us ended up choosing to bring similar essentials. Demi chose a worn but well-loved quilt; Natalie a fleece blanket; even the boys brought something they could wrap themselves into for comfort and warmth.
- † Not to be outdone, I brought a light down lap quilt that usually resides on our comfy couch. As night closed in and an uncertain and hard day loomed ahead, each of us wrapped ourselves in these symbols of warmth and safety.
- † And we were glad we did. We needed all the strength and courage we could muster for the day ahead. We might have wished we could stay wrapped in our sleep and security blankets, but we couldn't. For our presence and our love were needed for the debt of love we wanted to pay.
- † Our beloved Logan lay high in the Harborview Hospital ICU, unconscious and hanging on to life by a thread. At their own initiative, his friends from our youth group asked if I would go with them to help Logan, to let him know how much we wanted him back.

- † And so we did. Urgency led our decision. Logan needed us, and we needed to respond immediately.
- † When we return to the scriptures for today, we find that Paul is trying to evoke that same deep sense of urgency in his congregation in Rome. “Wake up, get up,” he writes. “Get going, it’s time!” “This is the day; this is the time for salvation. Don’t live in the darkness of the night; live in the light of the day!”
- † What has happened to get Paul so excited, so passionate? God has revealed God’s very self in Jesus Christ, that’s what! And not just that, but more. What God has done in the world, in a certain time and place through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, has changed everything, has changed the world!
- † The world is now a different place, says Paul. The kingdom of God has entered into the world, a wounded world that has longed for God and groaned for the good news.
- † God is here. The God news is that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God prevailed. Death is defeated; it is not the final thing. New life in Christ is the final thing.
- † Those bad things that Paul talks about—sins, we call them—may have separated us from God and our best selves, but in Christ Jesus, we are reconciled to God, and sin is not the final word. Forgiveness and grace are the final words.
- † Paul’s words were written to people who were trying to live a good life but having trouble doing it. Not so much has changed for us. We don’t live in the Roman world, but we live in a time that is no easier to figure out. Here we are, still looking for that good news, still living in a world groaning for God, yearning for healing, and seeking grace.

- † Here we are, wanting to believe that the power of God for salvation is still as possible as it ever was and ever will be. That is our faith.
- † And yet our faith is challenged and threatened every day. No more so when we lose someone so young, so beautiful, so loving, so funny, so smart.
- † What was God thinking? I've heard it from many of you, and I've said it to myself this week. Let me be clear about what I know God was NOT thinking.
- † God was not thinking, bored late one night, "Gee, I think I'll make Logan swerve off the road and knock him unconscious for a week and then die so I can teach a few people a lesson." Anyone who tells you that this is God's will is wrong. Logan knew that.
- † That's why he chose to profess his faith in Jesus Christ this spring, to be washed over by the waters of his baptism. For Logan knew that the God he offered his life to wasn't like that.
- † Instead, I think we get clues to what God is thinking in the words of the Apostle Paul to the people of Rome and to us. For Paul knew, and heaven knows God knows, that life can be random and the choices and accidents that happen can end our lives in a heartbeat.
- † And so we need to live our lives as if we are going to meet God face to face anytime. For if you live your life knowing that the relationship you have with God is more important than anything else in your life, well, if you live your life that way, then your behavior ought to reflect that this is what you believe.
- † It's not about doing good things and living right in order to win God's approval. Our actions don't bring us healing and salvation. But our faith, faith in God's actions, faith in God's love, and faith in God's

promise of steadfast belonging to God and to each other make all the difference in our lives.

- † Faith is also about doing, acting, and working in God’s kingdom here and now, doing the work of Christ in the place where we are, responding to that free gift of God’s love that we do nothing to earn but can do everything to show off.
- † Logan was pretty good at showing off God’s love in him. And so are you. Logan still has a lot to teach us about loving each other. And we still have lots to learn, even as we mourn his death.
- † Back to that day—Thursday—on the ninth floor of Harborview Hospital. As we entered his room, we did so not knowing who or what we would see. But even though his face was full of tubes and leads, we recognized our Logan.
- † Something you may not know: Logan loved to sleep. He slept in school but still answered all his teachers’ questions. He slept through confirmation classes at times, but still asked great questions and reflected with insightful answers. All this while he seemed to be asleep.
- † So we recognized Logan in his sleep. And we hoped he would just pop awake and answer all our questions. But it was not to be.
- † How odd, really, that this scripture about sleeping comes up for today’s reading. Maybe Logan was trying to tell us something in his sleeping. I know one thing. Even though he was unconscious, we all of us gathered in a circle around his bed, singing “Rise and Shine”, praying, holding on to him for dear life, and we felt his presence.
- † And as we gathered to pray one final time before we made the trip home, we felt someone else’s presence too. It was the presence of

Christ, standing at the head of Logan’s bed, there with us, holding on to him and to us for dear life.

- † For as Jesus tells us, where two or three are gathered in his name, there he is also.
- † So even though Logan didn’t wake up in this earthly life, you can be sure he is awake now in the greatest adventure of all. And he wants us to wake up, too, to the real truth that life is unpredictable and sometimes random.
- † So we ought to fill our lives—however long they may be—with love. As the translation in *The Message* says: “We can’t afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight.”
- † No, we are meant to wrap ourselves in Jesus—in faith, hope, and love. What if we wrap ourselves in him just as we wrap ourselves in our favorite comforter or fuzzy blanket? Our coziest sweatshirt?
- † Faith, hope, and love, all gifts from God, are warm and constant companions in the midst of an often cold and confusing world. If we live in the midst of these gifts, if we live as though there were no time to waste, if we live as if it is urgent that we tell the whole world about the glorious gift of God, tell by our lives, tell by our hope in what we say and what we do, and tell by showing our love for each other....
- † Then we would be wrapping ourselves in Jesus. And living our faith.
- † What is that faith we seek to live?
- † Here are the words that Logan helped write along with this spring’s confirmation class about what they believe:

We believe in God, the loving provider,

Who loves unconditionally both believers and unbelievers.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our brother,

in whose footsteps we seek to follow.

We commit ourselves to his teachings,

which are infinite in wisdom and love, and which provide strength for us  
when we are weak.

We are called together to celebrate God through the Holy Spirit,

which is a flame that never dies, and which guides us on our journey of faith—  
especially in the darkness.

We believe that God calls us to unite as one to overcome evil

and do unto others as we would have them do to us.

Even in the worst of times we cannot be alone.

We are there for each other and for our church as we serve our world.

Amen.

† Now I don't know about you, but these words, lived out by Logan (not perfectly) and by our youth (not perfectly) give me something to wrap myself in. In the days ahead, hard days for each of us—not just those who love Logan—but those whose own griefs and struggles threaten to overwhelm them—may we wrap each other in the love of Christ.

† And remember, wherever we are, there He is also. May we stay awake to the call of his love on our lives. And live as if each day were our last.

† We remember Jesus' love for us as we remember his last days on earth as well. For it was on the night that he gave himself up for us....

Source: The idea of wrapping ourselves in Christ comes from a sermon by Rev. Beth Royalty titled "Telling the Good News." [www.day1.net](http://www.day1.net)