

# LIVE PEACEABLY WITH ALL

# LOVE

God  
Neighbor  
Enemy

**PASTOR JESS SCHOLTEN**

**ROMANS 12:9-21**

Sunday, March 29, 2026

“Live Peaceably with All” | Romans 12:9-21 | Pastor Jess Scholten

Come with me on an architectural tour!

These ancient ruins are the Synagogue in Capernaum in the Galilee region, where Jesus regularly taught and healed people early in his ministry. He chose Capernaum, because when he first taught at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, at the very beginning of his ministry, he read from Isaiah 61, which begins:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,/ because [God] has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,/ to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

After Jesus read the Scripture passage, he declared that on that day in their very hearing, the Scripture had been fulfilled – that he – Jesus – was the one who had come to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight, and freedom for the oppressed.

It’s a powerful story and right at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. And it really messed with people’s heads. They wanted the messiah to be a King who was going to overcome; and instead, they got scrappy prophet from Nazareth who voted, every single time, for the underdog.

According to the Gospel of Luke, this was Jesus’ first act of public ministry. We started out worship with our first Scripture reading of Jesus coming into Jerusalem – his last act of public ministry. He rode in on a borrowed donkey, a sign of humility, a sign of coming in peace rather than a King riding in on a war horse. From the beginning to the very end of his ministry on earth, Jesus sought after the lost, last, and least – with humility and peacemaking, setting aside wealth, power, and might. This is Scripture’s example of Jesus, whom we follow.

Okay, okay – I said this is an architectural tour. Let’s get back on track. Architecturally, let’s notice how each stone fits on the other, visible building-blocks.

This is a wider view of the synagogue at Capernaum with an outline of the houses of the village. Also, note, palm trees, on this Palm Sunday.

These are the Roman aqueducts outside this region. This is up close, so you can get a feel for

the size of these aqueducts. Again, notice the stones – each fitting together for structural stability.

This was our guide, a Palestinian Christian named Claudia, on the pilgrimage I took to the Holy Land in 2008. She's standing by an olive press, a way more intense way to get olive oil than picking up a giant jug at Costco.

This is the wailing wall that's part of the Temple in Jerusalem. Notice all the stones, so intricately put together, that would have been part of a first-century Middle-easterner's landscape.

Even the art, like this mosaic, one of the earliest surviving depictions of the loaves and fishes, is small pieces fitting together for a full structure.

While Holy Week seems like a good time to do a little visualize-yourself-in-the-space tour, my purpose isn't simply to show you stacks of rocks. My purpose is for you to absorb some of the ethos of what surrounded Paul as he was writing our Scripture passage today as part of his letter to the church in Rome, a church made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers – people who had grown up with Jewish faith and ancestry and people who had been Romans either without faith or raised with beliefs in the pagan gods.

Because our passage for today from that letter is like a carefully architected structure of perfectly shaped stones. These 12 verses in Romans are like opening 30 fortune cookies and creating a vision from all the small pieces of advice. United Methodist pastor, James Howell, suggests a whole year's worth of sermons could be preached using one phrase at a time. He suggests reading the text very slowly, "maybe just one phrase a minute, or a week."  
([https://ministrymatters.com/2020-08-26\\_weekly\\_preaching\\_august\\_30\\_2020/](https://ministrymatters.com/2020-08-26_weekly_preaching_august_30_2020/))

I won't linger that long over the text, but I will read it slowly enough for us to ponder all the different ways Paul is casting a vision for what it means to be many parts of one body, living together as Christians, even with different backgrounds, different practices, and different ideas about what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus, living peaceably.

Hear the Word of God from Romans chapter 12, verses 9-21:

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. Thanks be to God for this God’s Holy Word.

See what I mean by the 30 little fortunes in a pile on the table? But this stack of stones builds the church. As we close out our six-week series on Loving God, Neighbor, and Enemy, a little review:

We kicked off with Love Extravagantly as we thought about our neighbors and used Pastor Charlie’s tic tac toe smiley face board to name some folks who either are our direct neighbors or are others we need to focus on to love.

Then Serve a Stranger thinking about Elijah and the widow and how God creates abundance when we serve each other.

We heard about Jesus showing mercy even on the cross, asking God to forgive even while he is suffering.

The youth emphasized loving and trusting God on youth Sunday, and Pastor Megan even had us washed one another’s hand at our Wednesday night service. Charlie took some great photos of this!

Last week, Pastor Charlie emphasized being courageous by speaking up, being open to changing our minds, and trusting God.

While sometimes a series is simply a series, this particular theme is a core to our faith – our yard signs, a few of which are still available, to Love God, Neighbor, Enemy are good in any season, because we are always called to love, for God is love.

This week, our theme is (slide of many parts of the passage everywhere): Well, it’s complicated.

It might more clearly look like this – a church made up of all those phrases.

After all, there are a lot of parts to this passage. Our curriculum writers made these verses into a to-do list – many of the phrases are things we are called to do – like rejoicing with those who rejoice and living peaceably with all. And many are a to-don’t list – like not lagging in zeal and not being haughty.

But the core of all of these phrases and the thing that will most help us to love God, neighbor, and enemy is this little gem right here: live peaceably with all.

That seems pretty impossible right now. How can we live peaceably with all when we are literally at war? How can we live peaceably when there is such vehement disagreement happening?

When we've lost the art of civility? When our politicians no longer take off their partisan hats at the end of the day and have a drink together or spend time with a variety of party members?

We have to practice and build muscles in the direction of peace, bending our hearts to peace, and practicing it every day like a vitamin. There are several verses that offer ways to build these muscles.

Hold fast to what is good. In yourself, in your neighbor, and especially in your enemy. Honoring that Imago Dei – that image of God that is in each of us... is one of the ways we hold fast to what is good. We do not have to love our neighbor's actions or our enemy's actions, but we have to love the human being created by God and in the image of God that our neighbor is. Not all behaviors are acceptable, but all people are.

Live in harmony with one another, which is translated: "think the same things" as each other. In other words, it is very likely that you and your enemy have some things in common. Desire for security. Hope for a brighter future. Some level of agency and control in their lives and for their family members. Find what you can agree on and lean into that.

Do not be haughty. All of us are capable of being curious and learning. We're all growing and in need of listening ears, having humility and patience in our conversations.

Overcome evil with good. As we were talking about living courageously this past Wednesday, a few folks mentioned a recent news story about James Talarico, a Presbyterian seminarian running as a state representative in Texas. Pete Hegseth's pastor and spiritual advisor prayed for Talarico's death this week. In response, he posted on X: "Jesus loves. Christian Nationalism kills. You may pray for my death, Pastor, but I still love you. I love you more than you could ever hate me." Overcome evil with good.

There are many ways to practice peace and so many resources for us.

An interfaith group I journey with is currently studying and practicing Thubten Chodron's book, *Working with Anger: Buddhist Teachings on Patience, Acceptance, and Transforming Negativity*. It's a challenging and helpful examination of anger that is good for this at least 10% percent Irish hothead.

There are a few of us here who practice nonviolent communication – or now more often called compassionate communication – which calls for a thoughtful process about how we use our words, speaking from our own truths, and the important separation of observation from evaluation. I've learned so much from this book over the years, since I was first introduced to it over twenty years ago at a retreat center in North Carolina. Too often, our observations come with a heap of judgment. And when that happens, even the faces of people who would say they value deeply kindness and compassion turn into venomous glares when they speak of someone they don't like. How can we hold our values of empathy and kindness even in the face of disagreement?

And speaking of kindness, practice active kindness. Open doors for people, make eye contact, and smile. Listen deeply when someone is having a difficulty – stop trying to fix things for others and be present with them. Sometimes people simply need you to bear witness to their challenges.

Melissa Hinz passed this gem on from HappyJustBeing.com (11/27/25), founded by a couple on the west coast trying to live more fully into being present, going with the flow, and finding joy in simply being. (<https://happyjustbeing.com/pages/about-us>)

“You might not realize it, but your kindness stick with people. Long after the moment passes, they treasure that moment because it reminds them that the world can still be gentle.”

A group of us are really excited about deepening our neighboring through our upcoming Awaken Covenant initiative. If you are looking for ways to build more peace-making skills and to be more comfortable in conversation others, as well as paying better attention to where God is at work in the world, please come join us.

Jesus came to bring us peace. We have to exercise peace-making muscles regularly, so that we can be the faithful church, built together by God into the faithful people of God – loving God, loving our neighbor, loving our enemy, living peaceably with all. May it be so. Amen.