



Over the last few weeks we have been looking at what it means to Step Out and make a difference in the places, where our lives intersect with those around us. I have encouraged you to take, seriously, the fact that God has called you to be His hands and heart to the neighbours He places you next to, on your street or at your work place. Then we looked at making a difference in our communities and we found that each week, when we leave this place, we have the potential to make a profound impact in over 52 communities in this city.

Last week we looked at being a neighbour to our First Nations friends. Many of you told me that last week really impacted your thinking. Today, I want us to look at what it means to be a contagious Christian and a contagious Church in our CITY. My hope is that as you and I meet together on Sunday or in our Small Groups during the week that a contagious enthusiastic fire is ignited within us and carry it into those places where God strategically wants us to help His fire catch fire across the city. This morning I want to look at how God's master plan of placing us together, as friends, is linked to our becoming a contagious force for good and God where we work, travel and minister in our city.

But before we do that, take a moment and turn to the person beside you (can't be your spouse) and tell them 2 things that are interesting about yourself. Everyone in this place has a story and if we take time to listen to each others stories it is amazing how it can change our attitude toward others and how friendships can be established. However, if you had a few hours and sat down with some of the people in your row and asked them to show you their family photo album (or Facebook profile) and allowed them to turn the pages in that album it wouldn't take long until you would begin to enter their world and discover what gives them joy, what are key themes in their lives, what breaks their heart and what fires them up. Those pictures in the album (or Facebook profiles) would help you move from knowing some information about them to becoming impacted by who they are and what makes them tick.

I. Church Directory of 1st Baptist Church in Rome

I had this thought the other day, what would have been like if one day I had a chance to sit beside the apostle Paul? I would sit beside him (like you are sitting beside the person next to you in the pew) and as we talked I would have noticed the scars that ran across his neck and down his arms from the beating he had endured. When I got my courage up I would have asked him, *"Paul, you have started churches all over the Mediterranean world. You have known some of the greatest saints who ever lived. Can you tell me what it means to be the kind of church and Christians to have the kind of contagious faith that can change a city?"*

When I was thinking about this, my first thought was that he would go to his Bible and begin to give me theological and biblical backing for what he believed. But it hit me that instead, he may have taken down his photo album (or licked open his Facebook profile) and began to turn pages (or scrolling through pictures) of Christians he had known and loved. That is exactly what we find him doing at the end of the book of Romans in Chapter 16. Instead of trying to sum up all his thought with great theological one – liners, he summed up all he has been saying by showing us a process, which he found was life changing and city impacting. It is so simple. First, we must believe that God has placed us together with other Christian friends by His divine power and plan.

Second, we must understand that it is in Unity, within the context of friendship, that we grow a contagious faith by caring for each other and serving with each other. Third, from this base, we can make a profound difference in those places God plants us, to work and live in our city. Let me show you how this work by looking at Paul's photo album (or Facebook.) Paul lists 36 people starting in Romans 16:1:

Phoebe (vs. 1)

The first person Paul mentions is the woman, who was carrying the letter to the church in Rome. Her name was Phoebe. Phoebe was from a place called Cencherea (a little town just outside of Corinth), which is where they used to have to go so they could meet as Christians without persecution. Now don't forget that with the fantastic road systems and the sea travel in that day that travel was fairly easy. I believe that as a business woman, she probably ended traveling from Corinth and setting up her business in Rome. She is called a 'sister in the faith' and Paul describes her using the word 'servant.' But this is the exact word translated everywhere else in the scriptures to describe a 'deacon'.

It is very possible that this lady, because of her giftedness and how she has been a great help to many in the church, is the first women deacon we find in Scripture. It struck me that I haven't preached on the role of women in the church. I guess I haven't done that for one simple reason. I believe that when God gifts a woman and places within her gifts (such as the gift of leadership) that to not allow that woman to serve to her fullest potential, simply gets in the way of the plan God has for them and the church God has placed them within. Paul's first picture in his photo album (or Facebook) is a lady who God brought from Corinth to Rome and placed leadership gifts inside a powerful woman of faith and action.

Priscilla and Aquila (vs. 3; Acts 18:2)

Here is the first of 3 couples Paul mentions here. Aquila is the husband, who was born near the Black Sea of Jewish background. Aquila married Priscilla, a lady from a very prominent Roman family. As a result, they were probably ostracized from Roman society. Then under Emperor Claudius, they, along with all the other Jews, were kicked out of Rome in 52 AD and traveled to Corinth. I believe Aquila ended up working along side of Paul because of his trade as a tentmaker. (Paul was also a tentmaker by trade too and used his job as a connection point to share his faith.) While working with Paul, he told Aquila and Priscilla about Jesus and they became Christians. Then when Paul moved on to Ephesus, they went with him to help support his ministry. There, they risked their lives to care for Paul (Acts 19.) Paul's note would have said, *"These are precious friends. During that riot in Ephesus, they risked their lives to save my life."*

It was also there, that they met a powerful Jewish orator named Apollos, who was a great speaker but who didn't know about Jesus (Acts 18:24-28.) They didn't argue with him; they just invited him home and shared Jesus with him. Apollos went on to be a great Christian evangelist.

We also know that wherever this couple went, they opened their home for Church meetings. Did you notice that Paul mentions Priscilla first? In those days, it was very uncommon to mention a women's name first, but it would seem that God had given her the gift of preaching and because of the power of her ministry she is mentioned first. Her ministry probably found much of its focus in the House Church that

met in their home. Due to transportation difficulties in Rome, they didn't have a central church but met in small house churches where it was a safer place to meet and often money would go into a building project to free fellow Christians who were slaves.

Epentus (vs. 5)

Sometimes when we read scripture we miss little gems. Look what it says about Epentus. It simply says that he was the first person saved in Asia. Just think about this...we know the name of the first person who was saved in Asia! Epentus, naturally, held a special place in Paul's heart.

Mary (vs. 6)

Mary was a Semitic name (Israel/Africa) by a Jewish background. All we know about her is that she is described by her work ethic 'toiler.' She worked hard for you. She was others-focused; the kind of person who quietly, with no fanfare, makes a difference. Paul wanted her and others to know that he noticed and was thankful for her quiet yet powerful work.

Andronicus and Junias (vs. 7)

Here is a couple that must have been so close to Paul's heart. You see, not only is Junias the third woman mentioned in a lead role in this church, but it says that Andronicus and Junias are Paul's relatives. It adds that they were in the faith before Paul. Maybe they grew up in Troas with Paul, watched Paul grow to become a superstar in the Jewish faith and then somehow they (themselves) became followers of the very Jesus that Paul hated. Actually, they played a lead role in the spreading of the Jesus teachings as they were closely connected to the Apostles. That meant that they were key targets in the same group, who Paul, had been spending his life trying to wipe out. One day they heard the rumour that he had become a Christ-follower as well and they took a chance and met with him. They walked with him and there was even a time when they were in jail together with Paul for their faith. They were key players in the church in Rome.

Ampliatius (vs. 8)

He is the one who speaks to us about discrimination. We believe that Ampliatius was a slave. But here is an interesting twist; they found the name of Ampliatius in the catacombs of the Domatilla cemetery. His tomb was decorated and by the way it was decorated, it was obvious that he was a leader in the church. Which means this slave became a leader in the church. There was equality of leadership, giftedness and ministry.

Urbanus and Stachys (vs. 9)

They are unknowns to us but they quietly make such a difference in their churches and Paul's life that they warranted recognition. I want to be like that.

Appelles (vs. 10)

(Greek) name means 'called one.' It says he was 'approved in Christ.' The way he lived, people saw Jesus.

Aristobulus and Herodion (vs. 10, 11)

Aristobulus is thought to be the grandson of Herod the Great (the one who ordered the murder of all the babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus) and Herodion (Part of Herod's clan – also Jewish) the secretary to the Emperor Claudius himself. And do you see the little side note? Paul adds he is a relative of mine. Here were 2 believers who were in places of influence. Paul also lists a man named Narcissus – I'll bet he was a selfish little kid.

Tryphena and Tryphosa (vs.12)

This is an inside joke. Tryphena and Tryphosa were twins. Typhena and Tryphosa's names literally meant 'dainty' and 'delicate' and yet they are praised for 'toiling to the point of exhaustion.' Small in stature, they had a huge impact in their church and area for Christ. Make me such Lord.

Rufus (vs.13)

Do you know who his father was? It was Simon of Cyrene; the man who carried the cross for Jesus at Calvary. I don't know what happened when he took the cross from Jesus. I wonder as he shouldered the cross if he heard Jesus say 'thank you' and saw in his eyes the heart of God and it changed his life. It changed his family's life. We know that Alexander, his son, was there along side Paul during the struggles in Ephesus. And Rufus ended up serving with Paul in Rome. Their mom was like a mother to Paul. She saw this single guy named Paul needed a mother to take care of him and she said I can fill that role for him. I hope my family goes on making a difference in people's lives like this one did.

House Churches (vs. 14,15)

Here are 2 groups who met in people's house (small groups), who together were worthy of mentioning. In this short passage Paul has mentioned 3 different small groups. These are people who turned their house into a church.

After covering these people from Paul's photo album (or Facebook), let me just give you a little larger view of how, where the journey people took to become members of the church in Rome.

II. What do we learn?

1. Ministry happens as God places us together with other Christians by his divine power and plan.

When I look at the matrix that Ken laid out in that overhead, I want to sit back in amazement. I see a hand a work that is larger than just chance. I see God saving people, growing them, moving them around and pulling them together with a large over arching plan that is amazing. Look at verse 21. This is the group who is presently teaming with Paul in his ministry at Ephesus. What a staff; what a great partnership God has established so that the words of Jesus could touch the city of Ephesus.

Now, look around this congregation. Ask yourself, how many countries, how many unbelievable stories, how many miracles of God's intervention and grace has happened for us to join together at this church, at this time in history, in this city of Calgary? If I were to do a matrix, it would look as impressive as the one I have just shown you. Please grasp again that you are not here by accident. A loving God knows what you need, Brentview needs and the city needs. He has, like a master strategist, placed us together for a reason. Your job is to discover what the role is He asks you to play.

2. God brings us together so that as we can care for each other and serve with each other in the context of Unity to develop a contagious faith.

Can I ask you if you think it was easy for all these people from so many different countries and backgrounds to get along? Do you think that because they were Christians that they never struggled to stay friends? I doubt it. Look at verses 17 and 20. Paul is saying that because you realize that God has brought you together, because you see God's hand on the formation as a church and because you understand that He placed you together for a purpose, you need to strive to do all you can as individuals to promote unity within your fellowship.

Friendships don't just happen to you; they are created as we spend time together. Friendships happen as you step out and shake hands Sunday morning to begin the process of getting to know someone (5 handshakes.) Friendships happen as you go out for lunch after services (Communion Sunday – get in the habit of having lunch with someone) and ask people what their faith and life story is. Friendships happen when we contact someone by Facebook or as part of a small group and pray for each other and help them walk through stuff. Friendships happen as we serve together at a senior's home, Jesus Loves you Society or at the Seed downtown. Friendships happen when we stand against anything or anyone who will come against the unity God wanted as He placed us together.

Why is this so important? It is because a contagious energetic city impacting church finds its heart as they share life with those God has searched the world for those He has planned to be your friend and speak into your life. Our job is be the one to make friendship happen. As we be a friend, we will receive friendship ourselves.

3. God places us in positions and jobs so we can make a difference in our city.

As we are placed together on purpose and share friendship, we then are placed by God in positions where we can touch others with the gospel of Christ and care for those in need. Two simple examples. Verse 3 talked about Aquila and Priscilla. Remember that they found faith as they worked side by side with Paul in their tent making job. His words and his work had a profound life changing influence on them.

Look at verse 23 where a man named Erastus is mentioned. Here is the story. He was the city director of public works; he was the person in charge of the city sewage system. He was just a working guy who found Jesus as his Savior. Think about what you know about where Christians hid during times of persecution. It was in the catacombs and the tunnels under the cities. This city employee knew exactly which the best places to hide his Christian friends were. I'll bet everyone wanted to be in his House Church. He used his job to make a difference in the city and in the lives of many people within the city.

If we want to be contagious enthusiastic Christians that impact our city we need to begin by realizing that God has placed us together in this church for a reason. He calls us to live in relationship with each other and in order to do that we need to keep making first steps toward each other so we share our stories and lives together. From that place of health we can then impact our city.

Interview with Mauricio Rosa (former attendee at Brentview and working with a Brazillian Church plant from South Calgary Church)

Question 1 How has your time at Brentview impacted your life?

Question 2 How are you being called to make a difference in the lives of people within our city?

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