**Loving the Family of God – Romans 16:1-16**

Hankies at the ready!

Been part of the church here for nearly 15 years:

* Started coming here in Oct 1999, bought house in April 2000, next door to Robin & Julia.
* Within 6 months – Feb 2000 - leading a small group (“17-30 Cell-Group” – later “Pelos”)[[1]](#endnote-1) – don’t think the church had any small groups at the time.
  + Julie Morimer – offered to wash up the mugs – got more that she bargained for!
* End of 2002 – ran Y-course – food, video & discussion, later XE
* Tots group, PA system, Friday Club, ASK, Men’s group, publicity, Substitute, music, Sunday School, website, Life Groups.
* Deacon for a few years
* Elder for 5 years. Preached 1st sermon here 23rd Nov 2003, PM. “Facing the future - faith in times of change” – Abraham – called to go East to an uncertain location – trusted God – and 153 times since!
* Marriage: Richard & Louise, David & Wendy, Rob & Marie, Mal & Fiona - & 5 funerals.
* 3 children born & raised here – missed John Hardwick because of Isaac.

Not saying any of this to sound impressive in any way.

* Simply to say that this church has been a huge part of our lives – all our adult lives so far. And you people have been at the heart of it.
* Reason for an unusual passage of scripture[[2]](#endnote-2):

Read Rom 16:1-16

Introduce you to some of the people that were special to Paul. Something deeply beautiful about the church. **Psalm 133:1**How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! Show some of that beauty – love - this morning.

Church in Rome – all sorts of people. Theology done – application done – greetings – see his heart.

**Single women**

**Phoebe**

* **Romans 16:1-2** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.
* Paul – Corinth. Most extensive explanation of the gospel. Need to get it to Rome – no Royal Mail! Carrying letter to Rome – trust – didn’t knock it out in an afternoon - woman – central to the life of the church.
* “servant” – diakonos – “deacon” – we have female deacons here too – Julia & Judith – servants
* “Sister Phoebe” – In Jesus, one family – adopted into God’s family. Were outside – through Jesus – part of his family. Bro / sister – Biblical terms. Phil!

**Tryphena & Tryphosa**

**Romans 16:12** Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

* Twins?
* “work hard in the Lord” – Gk: toil, work to exhaustion – need those women – church of Jesus Christ is founded on Apostles & prophets[[3]](#endnote-3), but a lot of the hard work is done by women getting the jobs done.
* 10 women & 19 men. In a culture where women were downtrodden – couldn’t testify in court – divorced on a whim – destitute. The church was radically counter-cultural then, and should be today. Where there is rampant sexism, objectification of women in our society – dignity, value, care, protection.

**Couples**

**Priscilla & Aquilla**

* **Romans 16:3-5** Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.
* “fellow-workers” – Paul was a church-planter – so were they – husband-wife church-planting team. Met Paul in Corinth & converted – planted a church in Ephesus – maybe others[[4]](#endnote-4) - now in Rome.
* Tent-makers – read their story in Acts 18 – partly supported their ministry by working alongside leading the church.
* I’ve done that too – worked the last 4.5 years alongside working in the church here. Profoundly grateful for all your investment in the Kingdom. You have put your money where your mouth is – training me above the building. Lord has honoured that. Please don’t forget it!
* Stuart as mentor – skill, experience, heart. Not many good pastors who can train others. Use him!
* “they risked their lives for me[[5]](#endnote-5)” – I don’t think Stuart has done that – but he’s taken a few risks with me – every trainee pastor has to do their first funeral / wedding / members’ meeting. Covered my back – taken flack – protected me and supported me – thank you.
* Brian – took a huge risk on my first sermon. And letting us run a study group within 6mo!

**Andronicus & Junia (v7), Philogus and Julia (v15)** – NIV missed out “and” for some reason.

**Own family**

**Romans 16:7** Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives

**Romans 16:11** Greet Herodion, my relative.

* Paul had relatives in the church in Rome. For some here, this is your only family. To a large degree, this has been our family too – children’s birthdays, Christmas, baby-sat, fed chickens – invited us over – eaten with us – helped us discipline our kids.
  + We’ve seen family a few times a year – part of our reason for moving.
* Can’t stay at Whitton – need to fly the nest. Can’t stay in Suffolk – too hard to “leave” here – and plenty of family in Stoke.

**Church families**

**Romans 16:10** Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

**Romans 16:11** Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

* Not all of them were “in the Lord” – many here are in that situation – some of the family loves the Lord – others don’t.
* Encourage you – not just you - was always like that – even in Paul’s day. Jesus unites but also divides. Part of rich picture of church.

**Romans 16:13** Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

* Rufus? Mk 15:21 – Simon of Cyrene – visiting Jerusalem one day – grabbed by a Roman soldier – forced to carry the cross of a convict – Jesus. Father of Alexander and Rufus. Rufus’ dad carried Jesus’ cross! Now Rufus is a believer! Real people – real families[[6]](#endnote-6).
* Wonderful to have families here – always a part of the church – grandparents, parents, children. Paul honours families – serving the Lord together.

**Older people**

**Romans 16:6** Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

**Romans 16:12** Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

* Older people? Past tense.
  + Tryphena & Tryphosa “work hard”
  + Mary & Persis “worked hard”.
  + Probably older ladies – Gk: toil, work to exhaustion - hardest service for the Lord is done.
* They’re here too – Bible honours older people – society doesn’t – but we do! Some on the back row been here, working, giving, supporting, encouraging, praying for decades – 50 years plus! “My dear friend Persis” says Paul.
* Not going to name names, miss someone out and we’ll all be embarrassed!

**Single men**

Epenitus, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Apelles, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas

* Lots of single guys – need you – time, energy, ideas, creativity, passion – not many at our church, but those we have are gold. Pray for them – and for single women!

**Wealthy**

Phoebe – v2 - “she has been a great help” – lit. patron – wealthy supporter – bank-rolled the church. Don’t have many of those here, but the Lord is good – building – no debts. He’ll provide for all your needs.

**Important and influential**

Aristobulus (v10) – grandson of Herod the Great?

Herodian (v11) – linked to the family of Herod too.

Erastus – city’s director of public works – chief architect

* Powerful people there too. Don’t have many – any. Pray for people of ability, skill, wisdom and influence.

**Bad background**

**Romans 16:8** Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.

* Names in Roman times tell you something about social status. Today: James, Edward. Pretty long odds on William & Catherine choosing Tyler or Dave.
* Ampliatus - slave name – Caesar’s household.
* Highly decorated, ornate tomb in Catacombs Rome – Ampliatus – obviously a man held in high esteem by the church.

**Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

* Love being here – background, wealth (or lack of it), education, family – not an issue. All one in Christ – brothers and sisters. Criminal record – Wendy! – others more serious – rub shoulders with police officers. Teachers hang out with people who can’t really read or write; builders with people who are a walking DIY death-trap.

Look at Paul’s affection for them:

* I commend Phoebe to you
* Priscilla and Aquilla risked their lives for me – grateful for them
* My dear friend Epenetus
* Ampliatus whom I love in the Lord
* Dear friend Stachys
* Dear friend Persis
* Rufus’ mother, who has been like a mother to me
* Greet the brothers
* Greet one another with a holy kiss. Or a firm handshake – or a holy hug.

He loves these people – right for a leader to love the church that God has placed him in. Paul’s not afraid to say it! Happy to say that I love you folks.

Final thing to say – what to leave you with?

**Romans 16:1-2** I commend to you our sister Phoebe – she’s great - trust her, love her, do what she says. I want to commend Jesus to you.

* Everything good, excellent, praiseworthy – embodied in Jesus.
* Lovely, joyful, peace-giving, patience, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled – in Jesus.
* Everything that is wonderful, beautiful, astounding, awesome, life-affirming, inspiring, generous – found in him.
* He is everything we are not. Perfect in every way. Utterly trustworthy, faithful, loyal.
* Full of grace, love to those who don’t deserve it. Loves people who constantly mess up and fall short like me.
* And he’s the only one that can get you to heaven.

Some of you know that – seen how he has worked in other people – work in progress – know he is real. Come to him today. Confess your sin – turn away from your way to his. I commend him to you.

Now, may the outrageous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and the thoroughly undeserved love of the Father,

and the intimate closeness of fellowship with the Holy Spirit,

be with you all, evermore.

Sing: We Rest on Thee – sang it after my 1st preach, at wedding.

*We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender!  
We go not forth alone against the foe;  
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,  
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.*

*Yes, in Thy Name, O Captain of salvation!  
In Thy dear Name, all other names above;  
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure Foundation,  
Our Prince of glory and our King of love.*

*We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,  
And needing more each day Thy grace to know:  
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,  
“We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.”*

*We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender!  
Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise;  
When passing through the gates of pearly splendour,  
Victors, we rest with Thee, through endless days.*

1. First study was on Hababkkuk, on Wednesday 12th April 2000 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I am thoroughly indebted to John Macarthur for his excellent study on this passage: <http://www.gty.org.uk/resources/sermons/45-119/love-for-the-saints-part-1> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Eph 2:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “all the churches of the Gentiles” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Lit. “put their neck on the line” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. There’s also Nereus and his sister (v15) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)