

October 5, 2014
Pentecost 17

"Balancing Little Things with Belonging to the Lord"

ROMANS 14:5-9

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

With the hot weather we have been having, there is an ever present fear and danger of wildfires. When a fire breaks out under these conditions we would expect our fire department to respond immediately and even call up airplanes to drop retardant on the fire to keep it from spreading. How strange it would be if a fire crew would say we cannot respond to the fire because we have to finish washing our fire engines. That would make no sense whatsoever.

It would be even more strange for Christians to neglect rescuing people who are lost and straying because they are busily engaged in less important things in the church. What we want for all people is that they belong to the Lord. We want them to be able to say with the Apostle Paul and with us, "If we live we live to the Lord and if we die we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we are the Lord's." If we get so obsessed with little things we might lose sight of what is most important.

Nothing is more important than belonging to the Lord. The little things are important but they always take a back seat to belonging to the Lord. Today we want to talk about "Balancing Little Things with Belonging to the Lord."

Little things can divide us

It's no secret that little things can divide us and so occupy our attentions and feelings that we start neglecting what is important. If Satan cannot divide us over false teaching, he will try to divide us by getting us bent out of shape over little things. This seemed to be happening among the Christians in Rome for Paul writes, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike."

Perhaps there were some who were saying that the best day to worship the Lord was on Saturday because that was the day the Lord chose for his Old Testament people. Perhaps there were others saying the best day to worship the Lord was Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. A few years ago we decided to have our worship for Thanksgiving on Wednesday night. For some that worked out better for their travel plans, and for others it just didn't seem right not to have Thanksgiving Day worship on Thanksgiving Day.

How sad it would have been if a dispute arose in this congregation on when to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Satan loves to stir up the pot and divide Christians by leading them into disputes over things that are not that important. A pastor friend of mine once told me the sad case of a major dispute that developed in his congregation when they were dedicating their new church building. The committee that handled the planning for the dinner after the dedication got into a dispute over whether to have full relish trays or simple relish trays of celery and carrot sticks.

Paul has some good advice on how to handle disputes over small things. He says, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." At first glance this might seem like the worst advice possible. Shouldn't you be telling people to lighten up and be less convinced? Instead he says be "fully convinced." The Greek word for fully convinced is used in Romans 4 to describe the faith of Abraham that was fully convinced or fully persuaded that God would do what he had promised. In order to be fully convinced that your way is the best you must look at the whole picture of what we are doing as a group of believers gathering around God's Word. If you keep in mind the riches of God's grace and the blessings of his kingdom it will help you to do what is best for the kingdom of God and for other members of the body of Christ. To be fully convinced, I will need to ask whether I am overly concerned about carrots sticks and celery because that was what my mom always served for her tasty meals. To be fully convinced I need to ask whether I want Thanksgiving worship on Wednesday night because that is the way they did it in my home church.

Now listen to further good advice from Paul on how to balance little things with what is most important. "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so the Lord and gives thanks to God." There seemed to be another dispute among the Christians in Rome in addition to worship on certain days. There were some who were saying it was wrong to eat certain meats, most likely meat that was sold in the market place and connected to the worship of idols. In Christian freedom these people decided to avoid eating meat, especially when they gathered for the fellowship meals. Others in Christian freedom were fully convinced they could serve the Lord and thank him by eating meat that ultimately was a gift from the Lord just as all our food is a gift from the Lord.

What do the meat eaters and the vegetarians have in common? Both of them are making choices that they think best serve the Lord. They have in mind the best interests of God's kingdom. They want to show their thanks to the Lord by avoiding meat or the opposite by eating meat. This past week I was reading as part of my devotions the excellent book on doctrine "God So Loved the World." The section I was reading dealt with prayer and especially how often we use prayer to give thanks to God for the many blessings he has showered upon us. I am thankful to be in a marriage where my wife and I can constantly remind each other of reasons to give thanks to the Lord for our many blessings. Our choir will sing a song shortly that brings out that point, "10000 Reasons." We also give thanks to the Lord by the decisions we make in the little things of life such as carrot sticks and celery or the full relish tray.

In recent years we have seen a major shift on how churches worship the Lord. The majority of churches in this community center their worship around a praise band and

popular Christian songs that you might hear on the radio. In Christian freedom we have chosen to worship by following a liturgy that goes back for centuries. We sing hymns old and new. We lead our worship with organ and piano. The choir will sing older well known hymns as well as new songs that are popular with Christians who listen to popular Christians songs on the radio. We love the new contemporary hymns that glorify Christ such as "In Christ Alone." Christian churches across the country are looking at music and asking the all important question "Is this music giving glory to the person performing it or is it giving glory to Christ and the truths of God's Word?" Whatever we do as Paul says, we need to do it for the Lord and not to promote ourselves. We make bad choices in music and worship if we try to bridge the gap between sinners and God with emotions and feelings rather than Christ, with human performance rather than with what Christ has done for us.

Our missionaries in Africa faced a dilemma. They wanted the African people to follow the format of the Lutheran liturgy because it is so beautifully Christ centered. The problem was the music written for the liturgy was foreign and strange to the ears of the African people. So the African people came together and developed music that they could sing to the words of the existing liturgy. Perhaps you recall the WELS Connection that showed President Schroeder sharing his thoughts about attending the vibrant yet Christ centered worship in our African churches. They wanted to worship the Lord with words and music that serves the Lord and gives thanks to Him. They did not want little things to divide them.

Belonging to the Lord unites us

We don't want little things to divide us. That is why it is so important to hear what Paul says about living and dying and belonging in the Lord. These words are often heard at a Christian funeral but they certainly also apply to everyday living for Jesus. "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Look at the blessings we share in common. We belong to the Lord. We live to the Lord. We die to the Lord. I cannot live for myself. I cannot allow the little things that are important to me become more important than belonging to Jesus Christ my Savior and my Lord.

What an amazing blessing it is that you belong to the Lord and that you are privileged to live and die for the Lord. This means that when you face life and all its challenges or even death with its dreaded sting you belong to the Lord. Jesus found you when you were lost in sin. He redeemed you and made you his own. Psalm 103 say he "redeemed us from the pit." Not a day goes without us seeing the ugliness of sin that enters our lives and makes us unacceptable to God. Jesus did everything necessary to remove that sin so you could be his own and belong to him. If we live Jesus is with us and if we die we are with Jesus. Romans 8 says, "We are more than conquerors through who loved us."

Jesus is Lord of the dead and the living. "For this reason Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." I know that my parents died believing in Jesus' death and resurrection. I know they are in the hands of the Lord. I know they are in a good place with Jesus. I also know that I am in the hands of the Lord and so do you. Jesus said in John 10, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch

them out of my hand.”

Little things in life are important to all of us, yet they cannot be so important that they cause us to lose our focus on the fact that whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. There is not a day that Satan does not tempt you and me to focus so much on little things we forget what really counts. Then it is time to sing a little song to ourselves, “Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me.” Then it is time to remember this verse of Scripture before us today, “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” Amen.