

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 11, 2005
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Romans 14:5-9
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 50:15-21
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103
Second Lesson: Romans 14:5-9
Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

It Is About More than Just Me

It's a little warm and a little sticky this morning, isn't it? Are you sitting there thinking, "Doesn't that person next to me know how much heat they are kicking off? Can't they move down a little bit? Don't they know how warm they are making me? What is wrong with them?" Are you thinking that at all sitting there this morning? Do you ever stop to think you are putting out the same amount of heat and maybe you should move a little bit away from them for their sake?

It's kind of interesting how that goes sometimes, isn't it? It's all about us. We think about what others are doing that affect us and we don't always necessarily think about what we do that affects others. A lot of times we just go through life thinking "it's all about me".

You know how it is. Your spouse does little things that kind of annoy you. Let's just say your spouse chews with their mouth open or chews real loud and they do it all the time and you think to yourself, "Don't they know how annoying that is? Why can't they stop?" Just little stupid things at times, but do you notice how our sinful nature works? Don't you recognize what YOU are doing to ME? Isn't that how our mind always seems to work? That is because we have got our sinful nature and our sinful nature always wants to put us at the center of the universe and have everyone and everything else rotate around us. It is just because we are born sinful. Sometimes it takes something large, something very tragic to shake us out of that, doesn't it?

As a country, four years ago today, there was a great tragedy and it shook us out of our "it's all about me" way of thinking for a short time, didn't it? And now with the devastation on the coastal states you see that on the news and it shakes us a little bit out of "it's all about me" kind of thinking and there is an outpouring of donations and support and help and prayers for these people. And yet, even as we find it within ourselves to help other people, our sinful nature at times still rears its ugly head because we will be helping, we will be giving, we will be encouraging others doing whatever, and then we will stop and think to ourselves, "This sure makes me feel good. I'm glad I'm doing it." Even in the midst of the best at times that we can humanly achieve, our sinful nature still is screaming "it's all about me".

The Words of God that are from Romans 14 that I read to you in our Second Lesson this morning that we want to talk about today remind us that as Christians we aren't alone and remind us that as Christians, its not just "all about me", but we are reminded this morning first and foremost that we belong to the Lord. And then secondly we are

also reminded that not only is it all about God, but for me as a Christian, it is all about my fellow Christians. Out of the same kind of love that God has shown me in Christ, I want to show love to them in my attitude and my actions towards them. That is what God tells us this morning.

Some of these tragedies that our country has gone through in the last four years remind us that things can be here and gone in an instant, right? It's easy to see the things that we talked about in Bible class today—the things that we look to for security or status can be taken away from us in a short time. The things of this world are here and gone. That is why the words that are in Romans 14 are incredibly comforting to us. They are a reminder to us that when it comes to our life, none of us lives to himself alone, 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. Think of that comfort.

It doesn't really matter what happens in this world that shakes us to our very foundation. It doesn't matter what happens to us that puts a knot in our stomach. It doesn't matter if we are going through the difficulty of having a child that is sick or having a spouse that is sick or losing a spouse or a loved one—we belong to the Lord. We have a God who loves us so intensely, so deeply, and so perfectly that he acted to make us his own. You and I couldn't go to him and kind of cozy up to him with our actions or with our efforts and say, "God, you must love me now more than those people because I am doing this for you." Each and every one of us are born completely separated from God as we heard again in the baptism ceremony this morning. We are born lost and condemned creatures. We are born separated from God. There is a huge wall there between us and God and that wall is our sins—the sins of our selfishness, the sins of all those times that we think it's all about us and we get so full of ourselves we can't see the hurt and the need and the despair around us because we are so busy looking into the mirror of our own mind and what we need. Even in those times and for those very reasons, Jesus came and lived and died for us. In those times our God reminds us that we belong to him.

Our Savior was perfect. He never was self-centered. He had compassion on people. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He did that perfectly each and every time the opportunity presented itself in his life on earth because you and I don't do it perfectly every time. He was perfect in our place. And then he carried to the cross every one of our selfish sins—our selfish thoughts, our selfish words, our selfish actions, our selfish attitudes—they were all there laying open his back, piercing his brow in that crown of thorns. They were there piercing his side and his feet and his hands. But he took them there willingly because he loves us perfectly. And he wants us and everyone else in the world to belong to him so that we can go through life with this confidence that whether we live or whether we die, whether things are going well or things are going poorly, whether we are celebrating or whether we are mourning, we belong to the Lord. There is no greater statement that we can really make. There is no greater comfort that we can find. You and I belong to the Lord, and that makes a huge difference.

It makes a huge difference in every area of our life, but this morning we are going to focus on the one that God talked about in Romans 14. It makes a huge difference in

how we look at our fellow believers. We recognize that we belong to them. We are not our own. We belong to God. We are slaves to God, but we also have a responsibility to our fellow believers.

The Holy Spirit has Paul bring up a couple of cases that would have been present among the Christians there in Rome about holy days and the food they ate. In the Old Testament ceremonial laws the Jews had different holy days that they regarded as holy and celebrated as holy because they were commanded by God to do so. Those that had been set free from the requirements of the law, the ceremonial law that no longer applies to people that have been set free by Christ, some would know they are free to celebrate that festival or not to celebrate that festival. It talks about it in Colossians—let no one judge you in regard to a New Moon Festival or Sabbath Day. Those were a shadow of the things to come. The reality is in Christ. But some people might say, “This is how I show my love to God. I set apart this day or this festival or whatever it is, and I am going to still observe it because that is how I show my love to God.” Another might say, “I know I am free and I worship God all the time and every day and to do it on this day is no more special than another. So I choose not to.” What he is saying is be fully convinced in your mind that what you are doing is right before God and gives proper glory to God. And if it does, then do it.

That is the same thing he says with the food that they ate. Some would eat meat that was sacrificed to idols because they knew those idols were nothing. Some wouldn't eat that meat because in their mind it was still too closely associated with idol worship and if they ate it, they thought that would be an affront to God. So they chose not to and that was their choice and that was fine. But those who chose to do so, they also could do that because this is a middle thing that God didn't say you have to do it or he didn't command it or he didn't forbid it.

But now, can you imagine the problems when you put a bunch of Christians together—Christians who are all sinners—and one says, “This is the way I am going to honor God and I've said in my heart I can do it and that's how I can glorify God”. And another one makes the exact opposite choice and says, “This is how I am going to honor God”. What do you think is going to happen when you get two sinners together that are making different choices? A sinful nature is going to start saying, “It's all about me and what I chose is better than what you have chosen. Why can't you be a better Christian like me?” And it can create problems.

So Paul reminds us to be confident in your mind that what you are doing is correct, and then don't judge your brother in regard to this. Show love to him. If he is doing it for the right reasons, praise God he is doing it. Don't say, “You should be more like me”. We might think it's silly, but we run into some of those same kinds of things yet today. God has told us to worship. He has never told us what style of worship to have. Some might say, “I like this style of worship better and I like this better”. Then they can start thinking because we are doing this style, we are doing something wrong. Or because someone else is, they are doing something wrong. Or we can start thinking we are better than they are because our worship is better than their worship. “We are using traditional solid truth of the liturgy so those that aren't are not doing what is pleasing to God.” We need to be careful that we don't make those assumptions when it's not there.

The same is true with these things, right—the gown? God doesn't command that a Pastor wear a gown. He doesn't command that he wear a black gown. A pastor can wear a black gown, a white gown, or no gown at all. People have asked me, "Why don't you wear a white gown? That looks cooler." I don't want to wear a white gown because when I am facing the altar someone is going to want to show slides on my back. I don't want to wear no gown because you would all just sit there watching the sweat spread on my shirt. This way you have to wonder.

But the purpose isn't "one way is right and one way is wrong". If you go to another church and they are doing something different—that is fine. Don't set up these false things where God hasn't set them up. If they are doing it out of their conscience before God and this is how they can honor God, then thank God that they are worshipping God and loving him and serving him. But be certain that it is something that deals with where God hasn't either commanded it or forbidden it. If God has commanded or forbidden something, that settles it. That's it. That's the end of the story. But in these other areas, be certain of it and then act in love toward one another.

Another area is in the Lord's Supper, right? We offer the wine—the blood of Christ in, with and under the wine, in two different ways—with an individual cup and with a common cup. God has said, "Take and drink". He hasn't said how or how it should be prepared. If one person says, "I prefer individual cup" and another says, "I prefer common cup"—that's fine. Just watch out that our sinful nature isn't saying, "Because I use (whichever one), I am a better Christian than the one who uses the other". That would not be God-pleasing. That would be going back to "it's just all about me".

We have a responsibility not to harm our fellow believer's faith by erecting barriers where God has not erected them. Our responsibility is to encourage them, support them, love them, admonish them when they are wrong, forgive them when they repent, but it is not to put up a barrier where God has not put up any. That becomes easier to do when we recognize that when we serve our fellow believers best, we are also serving God. We serve God because he served us and loved us first. That is why we live knowing "IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD" and "I love my God when I serve my fellow believers first".