

The Lord is able to make us stand

Romans 14:1-12

Good morning and welcome to worship on this beautiful Spring morning. It is such a joy to once again be able to come together as the people of God from every walk of life, multiple generations and cultures spanning across the globe to join together for one simple yet profound purpose – to worship the Lord. The Psalmist reminds us of this when he says,

“You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you. ⁶ Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. ⁷ When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me. ⁸ Among the gods there is none like you, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. ⁹ All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. ¹⁰ For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God.”

Let us pray!

Opening song: Give Thanks - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=412tR6HLnAE>

“Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. ² One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.”

When looking at this particular passage, we must keep in mind exactly what Paul is addressing. We obviously live in very different times where we, as both believers and non-believers alike hold onto certain ‘truths’ or rather, things that we believe as truth. In these modern times, we have access to all kinds of information, we are able to gain knowledge, discern that knowledge and then use that knowledge to piece together the many facets of our existence, not least of all, the many facets of our faith. For us today, we, for the most part, have the scriptures readily available to us, and when coming across certain passages, themes, words or concepts, things that would ordinarily seem foreign to our way of living, what is it that we do? Well we can go to a library, pick up the thickest, most detailed and comprehensive theological book, scan through the 2000 odd pages, find a chapter detailing with the very thing we struggle with and then have a read to figure out exactly what is going on... On the other hand, if your anything like me, where reading sounds somewhat more like a chore than anything else, the solution is simple to us – ask uncle Google! If that of course doesn’t work for you, well the next and probably most obvious solution to this would be to get on the phone, call up the pastor, and say, “Hey, I don’t quite understand this or that, what do you think?”

Whether it is by way of massive theological commentaries, uncle Google offering up a multitude of advice columns, book extracts and journal articles, or by way of the more human experience, what comes next in terms of that faith journey must be application... And this is what Paul is focusing on. You'll notice that Paul is addressing two specific groups of people, the weak in faith and those who are strong in faith – this is not referring to a little or to a great faith, a level of so-called faithfulness but rather the maturity of faith.

On one side of the spectrum lies the weak in faith, those who are immature in the faith who, as Paul points out, still hold on to the dietary laws and observe the important dates within the Old Testament covenant. On the opposite side of the spectrum we have the strong in faith, those who are mature in the faith who eat whatever is set before them and hold all days as equal. Now one would ordinarily stop and ask the question, who is right and who is wrong? Does Paul praise the one and despise the other? Does Paul look at one and say, *'well done you, you are getting it right'* while saying to the other, *'you've missed the mark completely, time to start over and get it right or you're out'*? Of course not.

For Paul, I believe this to be an exhortation for unity between the people of God. Living in the 21st century, and being able to get a glimpse of life in the 1st century, it is so easy, and absolutely remarkable, to be able to see the differences, to see how things have changed and how far we have come. When we look even amongst ourselves, this is still a fact of life – and yet there is one thing that is common throughout all generations and Paul makes it clear – whatever you do, in faith, do it for the Lord. We cannot allow a difference of opinion to overshadow the God who unites us in Christ Jesus. We cannot look down on those who are immature in faith thinking that somehow we are better than them because we believe we have it all together. And likewise, we cannot judge those who are mature in faith because they hold to certain traditions, liturgical practices or more rigid forms of worship. The call for unity is not man's call, it's not some idea that by achieving unity we will achieve a utopic society where everyone agree on every single aspect of life and faith. The call for unity is a call from God and has been His call since creation. Be united with Lord, be united with all of creation, be united with each other.

And it is at the cross of Christ where this call is so miraculously exemplified. By the death and the resurrection of Jesus, we truly see the extent of God's call to unity by faith. Philippians 2:1-2 says it like this, ***"2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind."*** Scripture elsewhere tells us that we have been united with Him (that is with Jesus) in His death, so to we will be united with Him (that is with Jesus) in His resurrection.

This is the example to follow and it is what each of us, as believers in Christ, should focus on. Scripture constantly reminds us of the need for unity with each other, not empty and rehearsed agreement on what colour the carpets should be or what colour to paint the walls, but unity in the Risen Jesus, it is unity with the One True God which governs, leads, directs, overflows into our faith communities. Paul goes on in verse 7 to say:

" 7 For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for 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." You are God's handywork, created in His image and in His likeness. You have been redeemed back to Him through the precious blood of Jesus, united in His death and His resurrection. As one body, though there many parts and each created for a specific purpose within that body, there is one central call and purpose – be united in Christ Jesus through faith!

Let us pray!

Song of praise: Yet Not I but Through Christ in me: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>

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