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Forgiveness

Romans 14:1-4 ¹ Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

A friend asked recently, “How has COVID changed things for you, apart from no more hospital visits, no in-person worship, weddings or funerals inside or youth meetings?” After we both laughed (because what else is there?), I thought about where I’ve seen the most change professionally and I have to say it is the elevation of FEELINGS. It is EVERYWHERE.

Everything is weighted, everything is political, everything is huge, and everything has unseen consequences. Case in point: Momma looked at someone’s school schedule and suggested a change to her son. The son’s response? Tears. Momma and son had to both be reminded they were ‘good people’. We’re just more than a little emotionally vulnerable right now. All of us.

I don’t know what emotions Paul was running into when he wrote his letter to the Romans, but it sounds like BIG EMOTIONS were around then, too. Basically, Paul defends vegetarians (even though ‘some’ think they are weak) and then says, ‘Who are you to pass judgment on others’, offering that the LORD can make the weak vegetarians stand. (BRATWURST SOLIDARITY, Y’ALL!)

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I offer this with some humor, but also want to admit that Big Emotions are everywhere in our world, and our congregation is no different. All of us are stepping into a world our generations have never seen before and we are all writing the book on how to deal with it as we go forward. That said, I want to offer some suggestions others have made in faith - even in scripture - to help us move forward.

Paul's letter to the Romans invites us to not pass judgment, but it doesn't say we have to join them. Does your diet include delicious brats? Good on you then. Your diet is made up of healthy and vitamin-rich vegetables? Winner, winner... Chicken-less dinner! But in either case, we are also invited to stay from condemnation. What helps me is to TURN TO WONDER. Often shared by the spiritual mystics of our tradition, WONDER is a state that allows us to hold others in God's wisdom and mercy and just ask questions. "Why do they eat only veggies?", "What in their past has shaped their need for bacon?", "How do they lift weights and look so healthy eating _____?"

Wonder is the state that allows us to suspend judgment and to still love someone while inviting a deeper understanding.

My second recommendation is not very original. It comes from God's story over and over and over. Jesus reused it and let us know it was pretty essential. FORGIVENESS.

Now I'm preaching to the choir, but the gist of it is "If God can have mercy on us, the least we can do is to show it to one another". Let's go back to the plight of the vegetarians. I'm a vegetarian, but I keep a cow to drink milk. Now my neighbor, who eats meat, kills and eats my cow. Seriously wrong, correct? While we can turn to wonder (like 'what on earth is going on in that diet of theirs they think eating other people's property is okay?') we also are comfortable in the position something wrong has been done to us. Within that position, we can approach our scary neighbor and ask, "what the hey possessed you to eat my milk cow?"

IF, IF, IF they repent and make actions to repent (replace the cow, promise to not eat their neighbor's meat, ask to be forgiven), we are then asked by God through the example of Christ, to forgive them, too.

And, how many times are we asked to forgive them? Yeah, we'll get into that on Sunday. Maybe bring something to eat if you get hungry?

See you at church!

With love,
Pastor Brian

"Peace within self has to be practiced!"

— Pastor Brian