

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost October 5, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Romans 14:5-9 (NIV)

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.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The grand old Duke of York

Oh, the grand old Duke of York,

He had ten thousand men:

He marched them up to the top of the hill,

And he marched them down again.

And when they were up they were up,

And when they were down they were down,

And when they were only half way up,

They were neither up nor down.

Believe it or not that little children's rhyme can be used to help us understand a theological term which often troubles many Christians. As the song points out there are sometimes when some one is neither up nor down – they're just in the middle.

Most often people tend to dislike things in the middle – they want things to be black or white – we're not comfortable with gray areas, people want to know if something is right or wrong. They get uncomfortable when the answer to their question is it depends.

Things that are neither up nor down, things that are neither black or white, things that are neither right or wrong, things that are in the middle – that's the subject of our text for today – the Germans called such things the *mittle dinge* (middle things). Such things are also called adiaphora – things neither commanded or forbidden by God.

Let me give you some examples: God's word forbids us to worship any God but the one revealed in his word. It was obviously wrong for the OT people of Israel to make a golden calf and worship it – giving it credit for set them free from their slavery in Egypt. It's obviously proper for us to address our prayers and worship to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit because that's how God speaks of himself in his word. One type of worship is right – the other is wrong. As Christians that is something we could readily agree upon. But when it comes to how or where or when we worship the God of Scripture – well that's something that's neither black or white. God has given us the freedom to make choices in those areas – so some chose to worship at 9:00 am others at 8:45, still others at 10:30. Some have midweek services, some do not. And for the most part we would probably not make much of an issue about those choices. Some choose to use an organ for worship, others choose, a variety of instruments including drums and guitars – God has no rules about such things. In fact string and percussion instruments are mentioned in the Psalms as being used in praising God:

(Psalm 150 NIV) **Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. 2) Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. 3) Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, 4) praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, 5) praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. 6) Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.**

Although God has no rules about drums and guitars – there are those who have some pretty strong feelings about whether or not they should be used in worship – and the feelings are strong both for and against their use! It's in situations like this that we need to be careful not to judge what God does not judge. That's the reminder that Paul shares in our text as he continues his discussion of how Christians can offer their lives as spiritual sacrifices to the Lord.

THEME: If God doesn't Judge, Don't You

- 1. You may be condemning what God allows**
- 2. You will be violating a divine decree.**

Christians are not always inclined to do things the same way – that's obvious from some of the examples we've talked about already. That was also true at the time of the Apostle Paul. He calls attention to this fact as he writes: (Romans 14:5-6 NIV) **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.**

In our text Paul is setting down a principle to use in dealing with adiaphora – things in the middle, things neither up nor down, things neither commanded nor forbidden by God. He begins by pointing to a well known situation in the first century Christian Church – the day of worship.

You can imagine how this could have been a concern – in the OT God required his people to set aside the sixth day as a day of rest and worship. The OT Sabbath day as it was known was a picture of the spiritual rest that the Christ would provide for God's people – the OT Sabbath and all of the other commands regarding the worship life of the Jews pointed them to Jesus. The OT ceremonial law was not binding for all people and all time. It was for God's OT people. Once the Christ fulfilled those laws they no longer served a purpose – Paul spoke of those laws as a shadow of things to come. (Colossians 2:16-17 NIV) **Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17) These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.**

So since God no longer requires us to worship on a specific day – which is the right day for worship? That's a loaded question isn't it? As Paul pointed out in our text one person might have a good reason for selecting Saturday – it would have been very difficult for a Jew who was in the habit of worshipping on Saturday to set aside that custom – it just would not have felt right to neglect worship on that day. On the other hand, the convert to Christianity who wanted to focus on the resurrection of Christ could not be faulted for using Sunday as his day of worship. Since as far as God is concerned there is no right or wrong day to worship each one needs to decide in his own mind how they will worship the Lord and give him glory.

Let your conscience be your guide in matters not determined by God's word – that's the principal. Conscience always plays a role in a believer's faith and life. Some cannot take a drink of beer or wine; others do so without any guilt and without misusing it. Some Christians are conservative in their political views –

others are liberal but still hold the line in areas where God has clearly spoken. Some can dance without allowing their mind to be filled with lustful thoughts and others know they can't and chose not to dance. God has allowed these freedoms and rights within the confines of his unchanging will.

Each believer needs to know himself when it comes to making choose in about things that God has left open in Scripture. God gives the believer the liberty to use whatever he does not forbid. And just as importantly God gives the believer the liberty to abstain from using whatever he personally feels he should not use. And both can be ways of giving glory to God.

Paul began this chapter of Romans by saying: **Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.** (NIV) Many times people takes these words to mean that someone with a stronger faith needs to give in to the one whose faith is weak and that the one who is strong is obligated to do what the one who is weak in the faith determines is right. That, however, would be a misunderstanding of the principle that Paul sets forth. Paul wants us to take weakness into account as we decide on our choices of activities – my own weakness as well as the weakness of a brother. To deny anyone the right to do what God neither commands or forbids would be condemning something that God allows and making a judgment against a decision to which God has led a fellow Christian.

In love, Christians will respect the choices of others when it comes to as long as those choices have been made after consultation with God through his word and prayer. And so, while you and I may not always agree with the decision of another Christian or even with the decision of another group of Christians – we cannot call such decisions improper nor should we set aside our own conscience to follow the conscience of someone else. The better we understand that in the Lord's Church there are lots of things which are neither up nor down, right or wrong the easier it will become for us to preserve the bond of fellowship and love which the Lord calls us to enjoy in his church. We will feel free to express our own opinions but ultimately we will be willing to accept the decision which God has led the group to make – knowing that God can be glorified in more ways than one.

Paul explains the reason for this in our text; (Romans 14:7-8 NIV) **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.**

Because all Christians belong to the Lord we will be careful in our dealings with each other not to judge what God doesn't. If we judge what God doesn't judge we may be condemning something God allows and we will be violating a divine decree which calls on Christians to follow their conscience as they seek to give glory to God. This is the very reason that Christ came into this world so that we could enjoy a relationship with God. The closing verse of our text reminds us of the basis for that relationship with God.

(Romans 14:9 NIV) **For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.**

Christ lived and died and rose again that we might live with him and for him. That was the purpose of his ministry. Whenever a doctrine or teaching of Scripture is not an issue the strong should not question or despise the weak nor should the weak despise or question the strong. We are all one in Christ and posses the same salvation and the same desire to glorify our Savior – we no longer live for ourselves but for him and so long as he is glorified we will be content. Christ died to set us free and to enable us to live under him in his kingdom and to serve him in everlasting, righteousness, innocence and blessedness. To pass judgment on a decision which another believer has reached under God's will is to violate God's decree and will.

We have been called to glorify God with our lives. And one of the ways that we can do that is to refuse to judge what God has not judged. Amen.