

INI - SDG

23rd Sunday a. Trinity

October 26, 2008

Hecla

Text: Romans 14:13-23 *Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

Theme: Our Blessed Christian Fellowship

- The work of God
- Walking together in love

Dear fellow members of the kingdom of God, heirs of eternal life by grace through faith that is in Christ Jesus, fellow redeemed,

Pastors are really no different from any other Christian. He too is a sinner. He too needs a Savior from sin. People are sometimes surprised to hear that. I on the other hand am surprised that they don't know that. No matter how much time a pastor spends studying the word of God or in the ministry these things never change. But also like his members, a pastor too has freedoms in Christ. And though pastors have this freedom they wise to be careful how they use that freedom. Let me give you a couple of examples. One pastor who grew up in the 1940-50's knew it was not sinful to enjoy an alcoholic beverage. By no means did he abuse it or drink in excess. Yet he grew up in a time when drinking alcohol, even in moderation, was viewed as being questionable behavior. And so as a pastor, if he was relaxing at home at evening, enjoying a drink, and someone would show up at his doorstep, he would be quick to hide that drink - even though he knew he had the freedom to drink it and was not sinful to do so.

Let me share with you another example that fits well in this election season we are in. One particular pastor had son in grade school was very zealous for a particular presidential candidate. Now, judging by the age of this boy I doubt he really understood the issues and what that candidate stood for. Nonetheless one day after school this young boy got out his crayons and piece of paper and made a sign for the front yard of the parsonage. That piece of paper remained in the front yard until dad came home. It wasn't that this pastor was for or against this particular candidate, his concern was merely a fear of offending someone. Though this pastor had the

freedom to express his political views he chose not to.

These are probably two examples of things that few if any of you have ever thought of - nor do you necessarily need to. The point of this illustration is to make you think. How far would you be willing to go to avoid causing your fellow Christian to stumble and possibly sin against his conscience. Let us consider this blessed Christian fellowship and our conduct among our fellow Christians. May the Holy Spirit work mightily in us that we may bear the fruits of peace, joy, and love in our lives and among each other. Amen.

- THE WORK OF GOD

How did each of you get to church this morning? All but one of us arrived in a car. Some of you served as drivers. Most of you were passengers. Some of you were picked up. That's how you all arrived at this building, but how did you get here this morning - as a Christian? How did you become a member of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints? How did you get here - as a believer in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins?

Scripture could not be clearer about how you got here. In verse 20 of our text Paul calls believers, "***The work of God.***" Becoming a believer in Christ Jesus is the work of God and the work of God alone. While you drove yourself to this building this morning, you became a member of the Kingdom of God as a passenger, God was the driver. "***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,***" Paul wrote in chapter 10. To the Corinthians he writes, "***No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.***" (1 Cor 12:3b) Getting to this point as a Christian wasn't our work, our choice, or the choice of our parents - it is solely the work of God. Jesus Himself says in John 15, "***You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.***" (Jn 15:16)

If you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as your Savior from sin it is only because God has worked that faith into your heart. And He did the exact same thing for the person in sitting next to you in the pew, or in the pew behind you, or in the pew in front of you. The same God who worked in your heart to rescue you from the kingdom of darkness to His own kingdom of light and life, did the same work in that person's heart. He worked faith in your heart and He worked faith in the other person's heart.

The same Jesus that had to die on the cross to save you from all of you ugly sins, had to die on the cross to save him or her from their ugly sins. The same holy, precious blood that was shed for you, is the same exact holy, precious blood that was shed for them. This is the blessed Christian fellowship that we have. It is God working in each one of our hearts through His Word and through the sacrament of baptism to create faith. Faith which looks to Jesus alone for salvation. We all share this blessed Christian fellowship for we all share Christ in common. Just as Paul writes to the Ephesians, "***There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.***" (Eph 4:4-6)

- WALKING TOGETHER IN LOVE

Last Sunday we talked a little bit about that strange word "adiaphora." Do any of you remember what it means? Adiaphora is a word we use to describe something that God has neither commanded nor forbidden in His Word. Take for instance the use of musical instruments in church services, especially the organ. God has neither commanded that these instruments be used nor has He forbidden their use - it is adiaphora. Yet in the late 1800's and early 1900's there

was a theological professor in Kentucky named J.W. McGarvey. Professor McGarvey taught that it was sinful to have any musical instrument used in sacred worship services. I imagine he saw these instruments being used in secular settings and thought they were not fitting for church services. Yet we know that he was wrong. The use of a particular instrument in church is adiaphora - something that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. A congregation can use it if they want or they can sin without instruments if they want.

In the early days of the Christian church there was a question about meat that was offered to idols. For instance a cow might be sacrificed by the Greeks to the false god Zeus in the morning and parts of it sold in the Greek market place in the afternoon. Now Paul in our text says, ***“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers it unclean, to him it is unclean.”*** It would not bother Paul at all to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. The Triune God made the cow and now Paul was going to eat it. What heathens did made no difference to him, because he knew idols were nothing. Eating meat offered to idols was adiaphora.

However, not all had such a strong faith as Paul. There were other Christians who would look at that meat and associate it with the worship of a false god. While it is something that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God, their consciences couldn't get over the fact that this meat had been sacrificed to false idols. While Paul knew that he have the freedom to eat that meat, this brother cannot get over where it comes from. And so it would have grieved him to see Paul eating it.

Those of you with young kids have probably realized that kids imitate their parents. Little Jill wants to be just like her mom and do everything her mom does. Little Joe wants to be just like his dad and do everything dad does. It's cute, but it's not always safe. Dad has learned from years of experience how to swing a hammer and hit the nail instead of his thumb. Little Joe only sees his dad doing it and he wants to do it too. So when no one is watching he holds a nail with is left hand and takes a swing of the hammer with his right. The result? A sore thumb and tears. Little Joe didn't know what he was doing, he only did it because he saw his dad doing it.

Christians can be that way too, only when it takes place among Christians the results can be much worse than a sore thumb. For instance in Rome a weak Christian might see another Christian eating meat sacrificed to idols and he follows in step, not because he convinced it's right - in fact his conscience tells him it's wrong. Yet he does it because he sees another Christian doing it. The result? Sin. The last verse of our text reads, ***“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”*** If it was a decision that was not grounded in faith, then it is sin.

So what is the Christian to do? Paul writes in the first verse of our text, ***“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.”*** In matters of adiaphora the Christian should do all he can to help his fellow believer along, rather than slowing him down by placing a stumbling block in his way. ***“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”*** Rather than demanding that we have the freedom in Christ to do this or to do that, we should instead look to establish peace among the brotherhood. Rather than tearing another down with our decisions, we should look to do everything we can to build them up. This is walking in love.

To put it more strongly Paul says at the end of verse 15, ***“Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”*** And again in verse 20, ***“Do not destroy the work of God for the***

sake of food.” “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.” When Paul puts it that way we begin to see how foolish it all seems. Why would I *ever* want to destroy the work of God, destroy the one for whom Christ died just because I wanted to eat this or drink that?

This applies not just to meat offered to idols - it applies to all open questions - all adiaphora. If we know our brother is troubled by a particular act, which you have the freedom in Christ to do - let us resolve to not place a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. Rather than demanding our rights, let us walk in love in this blessed Christian fellowship. Do you have faith that you have the freedom to do these things in Christ? Then as Paul says in verse 22, ***“Have it to yourself before God.”*** Praise God that He has helped you to see that!

So why did one pastor hide his drink when someone showed up at the door? Though he had the freedom to do so, he was walking in love. Why did the pastor take the political sign off of his front yard? He did not want it to be a stumbling block for any of his members. May God help us to see what a blessed Christian fellowship He has brought us into that we may walk in love. Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. To this end help us, dear heavenly Father. Amen.