

The readings for today are about judgement and forgiveness.

Judgement, we do it all the time and God wants us to stop.

And Forgiveness, we don't do it all the time and God wants us to start.

Paul's letter to the Romans echoes scripture in Matthew...why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and ignore the plank in yours?...and of course, coming from Paul, this can be seen as quite comical, as he is constantly pointing out that others are weak in faith.

There are many points of disagreement we have in the church...homosexuality, abortion, evolution, ordination of women, Eucharist, resurrection...If you see any one of these hot buttons, or for that matter, any other disagreement as a basis for excluding someone from fellowship, then be aware, Paul is speaking to you.

We should not be quick to judge others because of their views, as believers we are called to live in community. That doesn't mean you shouldn't advocate your position, but it does mean you should do so in love, respecting others, listening carefully to their viewpoint while knowing that God is the final arbiter of our lives. People can hold radically different views and still be good and faithful Christians.

Many want to form community only with those that are like them...people that look alike, people that think alike...we get comfortable in what we believe, who we want associate with. God calls us to stretch our minds and to stretch our comfort levels. Paul says to welcome those 'weak in the faith'. Welcome those that disagree with you, welcome those that see things differently...not to try and change them, not to try and engage in debate...but to accept them as equals in Christ.

Our strength comes not from our traditions or how many people we have in church...strength is not defined by how much scripture we can quote, or how much money we contribute to the church. Our strength lies in the integrity we have, living lives that reflect our beliefs. Pointing out the weaknesses in others can only in turn make us weak. With careful reflection, who knows, perhaps the "weakness in faith" we see in others, is actually our own weakness. When we listen with love and respect to others, who knows, we may just discover a new way of viewing our own faith.

When we come together in faith and community, we should be celebrating our differences as well as those things that we share in common. We know that some of us are struggling: economically, physically, in their relationships ...we know that some are riding high with victory in their lives...and we know that some are just coasting along. God has invites us all to experience community with significance and purpose. This doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. Discovering joy may take us in new directions, out of our comfort zone and into a willingness to try new things. This comes with the responsibility of tolerance. Our spiritual practices must come from a conviction deep inside us, not from someone else.

Our community must embrace diversity, we must look for new experiences outside our own traditions. We must experience love for all, as equals before God, celebrating community together. How many of us are holding onto a grudge? Is there someone you have been hurt by? Someone maybe you say you've forgiven, but you have put them out of your life? Someone you give a cold shoulder to, someone you look past at the grocery store? Is there someone who just bugs you so much, you just can't stand it? Peter says Lord, how many times must I put up with

this? It must end sometime...should I put up with it seven times? If you're counting the slights...one, two, three...have you truly let go? Or are you still harboring resentment? Just hiding it and hoping it goes away?

Genuine forgiveness is more than just forgetting. It is not putting the pain out of mind and resolving to move forward. It is not smiling politely when you pass that person on the street. No, forgiveness involves embracing that person; loving them truly and continuing to support them. Not just letting them go...live and let live but choosing to live in community. A hard task.

Stop counting, is what Jesus says to Peter. Free yourself from all resentment. Listen, there is no longer any need for us to be so sensitive—we gain nothing by it—no need for us to be so concerned about our own honor—no need to be indignant when others repeatedly wrong us—no need to continually judge those persons—we need only accept them just as they are and forgive them for everything, absolutely everything, without end, without qualification. Is it not truly an enormous grace that we can enjoy such peace with our neighbor—that no one and nothing can ever disturb that peace? Here our friendships, our marriages, our brotherhood and sisterhood receive precisely what they need, namely firm, enduring peace through forgiveness.

Perhaps it is easier to forgive others before we can forgive ourselves. I still have regrets about things I did when I was younger. I still feel bad about how I treated my parents when I was a teenager. I have regrets about things I did in my 20s. I still do things that I'm not going to share with you. Things I'm ashamed of and wish I had handled better.

God has already forgiven us. We have a responsibility, a command to pass it on. To ourselves and to others. We need to be a conduit. Forgiveness flows from God, through us, and we pass it on.

Forgiveness is to live your life in a way that is aligned with God. Living a life of meaning. Holding on to regrets, past offenses, anger, disappointment in yourself or others, it creates a wall between you and God, your neighbor, your community. Forgiveness is not for the benefit of others, but for you. Without it, you can't commune with God.

The Kingdom of God is here...You have to act like it's here...If everyone acted in a manner that suggested the Kingdom was here, it would be here...but you can't go around pissed off at others who are not acting like that, you just have to do it yourself. You can't impose your views on others. You can't expect everyone else to act the way you think they should. You can only live out your life in accordance with your understanding of your place in this world.

Judgement and Forgiveness....One, we do all the time and God says stop. The other, we don't do, and God says start and don't stop. They are intertwined in our lives. To live life fully, to find joy and meaning, we must embrace our neighbor, without judgement, and forgive all, without condition. *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*