

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 21 Sunday 27 May_2018.

Transformation through relating in Community.

Background text READ **ROMANS 14 esp verse 17.**

This year we are exploring what it means to be truly human. Also, I pray that we will seek individually and together to bring greater glory to God by the way we live our lives in relationship to others and with God. (Chapters 1 – 11 God’s mercy to us through Jesus. Simply amazing – respond with giving glory to God)

(PP2) Romans 12: 1, 2 True worship involves my whole self-including my mind (NOOS) and also my body (SOMATA) – a living sacrifice and not a dead one. True worship then is not just the words of praise I utter or sing with my lips but the way I think and live my life.

In what way do you and I need to change our minds? Do our attitudes need to change at any point? Perhaps our view of certain people even within the church? Our view of God? Our view of what the Kingdom of God is all about and what is pleasing to God?

Chapter 14 is about getting on with others in the church because we agree on the priorities and are not too concerned about various matters of “religious ritual”. Verse 17 seems the key verse to me: *God’s Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace and joy which the Holy Spirit gives. V18 And when people serve Christ in this way, they please God and are approved by others.*

Indeed, Paul argues that the transformation of mind and behaviour that we need comes about as we make this personal offering and as we help and encourage one another in the community of God’s people to do this.

V2 We are not simply to conform to the practices and prejudices of this present age – whether they manifest themselves in the world or in the church. We are to resist the outward pressures to conform (SUSCHEMATIZO – to be squeezed into a mould by the world) – **instead we must seek to become what God wants us to be. Let God shape the way we think.**

Within this is surely the understanding that human identity, purpose, meaning and satisfaction are discovered in personal relationship with God BUT ALSO AS WE REITERATE TODAY IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.) **The priority** therefore is the *common good* rather than me and my interests. We need to work at getting on even if we do not agree on everything. *“All Believers are to accept one another unreservedly in Christ (14:3). If we want a healthy church avoid divisive attitudes.” David Coffey*

Paul calls upon the Christians in Rome to WELCOME – PROSLAMBANESTHE - to receive others even if regard them as “weaker” in their spiritual discernment and understanding about “eating and drinking” – religious customs or dietary practices. **In**

the house congregations of Rome, they disagreed over what foods you could eat and which holy days you had to celebrate.

Paul identified 2 groups that he called the “strong” and the “weak”. The strong (with whom he obviously identifies) have no hang ups/ reservations about what Christians can and can't eat. They also felt that no day was more holy than another and every day belonged to God. But he also says that this group must not despise the weaker group that have specific religious practices.

This group thinks Jewish food laws, festivals and certain Sabbath celebrations must be adhered to and that the “strong” group of non-adherents is really not very spiritual. So, in Rome one group regards the other as lax and careless and the other regard them as rigid and inflexible. This is not the way of judging what is truly spiritual and of God's Kingdom.

ARE THERE LESSONS THAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THIS AND APPLIED TO OTHER AREAS WHERE CHRISTIANS DISAGREE? Probably that is okay to disagree over matters of a non-essential nature – we don't need total conformity. **This does not mean of course that just any sort of behaviour is acceptable at all or any times.** We need to consider what is pleasing to God and what is for the common good. If there are differences of opinion as to what is permitted or beneficial then we can use Scripture as we are today, discuss as we are today and seek to discern what is non-essential. Somethings are worth disagreeing about (and even arguing about) but others are certainly not. (Possible “non-essential” issues e.g. Christians smoking? Buying lottery tickets? There is no specific biblical teaching to refer to).

Key ways of thinking and operating: would I agree?

Verse 3: Despising brothers and Sisters would be a wrong attitude...and could well spring from spiritual pride in ourselves. V4 The Lord JESUS is “Master” to both groups in this case – we share the same Lord (NB Parable of late workers in vineyard Matt 20: 1-16. I may choose to do what I want – you have been fairly paid). Principle vv7,8 – we are to live or die for the Lord and vv10,11 even as Christian we will have to give an account of our lives to the Judge.

Verse 13: Don't do anything myself that would cause another Christian to stumble and fall into sin. Remember that the context is about the consumption of various foods. It is not food that makes us true followers of Jesus – food does not make me ritually clean or unclean e.g. eating pork does not make me unclean BUT as an act of love I choose not to eat certain things or serve certain things to my fellow Christians if it hurts or distresses them. I'm free in my conscience to do it but I choose not to. (Indeed, if we had a visitor of another faith we would also serve food that would not cause offence).

Hold these in tension with the above:

Verse 16 Do not let what you regard as good get a bad name (NIV be spoken of as evil). There is a place not to keep silent – but rather speak out against and correct false

teaching or incorrect or unhelpful views. Sometimes we must introduce a notion of dissent.

This is quite a lot to hold together and in tension in our relationships (in the church) and

(PP 3) Key verses in Romans 14 are verses 17 and 18. The Kingdom of God (which Jesus ushered in and makes possible) is manifest not in dietary requirements as keeping one day more holy than another but, ***in the righteousness, peace and joy that the Holy Spirit gives***". This is what pleases God and

Verse 19: WE (the community – the collective) must always aim at those things that bring peace and strengthen (edify) one another. V20 – Food rituals are NOT as important as what God has done. God has broken down the walls that divide us. **Live consistently with what you believe – anything not based on faith is sin.** My trust is in Jesus not eating ritually clean foods! Eating fish at least one day a week I'm sure will make you physically healthier but it won't make you ritually clean! **Real signs of the Kingdom – God's rule and presence among us:**

Righteousness: people acting justly and pleasing God

Peace: shalom and harmony (work for this it means we have to work hard and consistently to hold together "a spirit of unity in the bond of peace"(Ephesians 4:3-13).

Joy: delight in the journey. Following Jesus should make us joyful – it is a fruit of the Spirit. (Religious regulations can make people miserable if that's all they are!)

Summary: we can enjoy our freedom in Jesus but must do all that we can to work for unity in the community of faith. My total freedom is limited by the Law of love for God, my brother and sisters and my Neighbour.

Verses 5 – 8 Note how often "the Lord" (Jesus) is mentioned! We are to base our opinions and practices on what Jesus thinks and not our prejudices and preferences. Are we prepared to "change our mind" (12:2)? God's will and pleasing God is paramount.

14: 3 Stop judging one another... 1 C 4: 5 Paul says here: *Judge nothing until the appointed time.* What Jesus plans for my brother or sister is not fully known to me – see *John 21: 21, 22.*

"Our task is to serve the Lord, not police the Saints". (David Coffey).

It is not an easy task to work out what it means to "love one another" but also where we are to leave others to their own decisions and consequences of these decisions...