

13/9/20 Romans 14:1-12

A little story to begin with which I found. A young couple move into a new house and next morning whilst having their breakfast, they saw the next-door neighbour hanging some washing out. The wife remarked how the washing wasn't very clean and that she could do with better washing powder or a lesson on washing! This conversation happened every time the neighbour put the washing out until one day the wife commented on a line of nice clean washing. 'Maybe she's learned how to do her washing properly,' she said, then the husband replied, 'O I forgot to say that I got up early and washed the windows.' That is a little cautionary tale which highlights that what we see when watching and judging others depends on the 'window' we're looking through, especially if our own perspective of life is clouded by anger, jealousy or negativity. "Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are." A quote by Jonathan Kestenbaum.

Looking at our reading from Romans today, Paul speaks about Christians who observed certain foods or special days, with so called 'strong' faith who were looking down upon others who had a 'weak' faith who honoured God in different ways and this judgement was causing unrest which was not of God and this is what Paul was addressing in his letter to the Romans.

Christians can be the worst for judging people because of different lifestyles which come in many various guises. There are religious communities, who can be the most lovely, caring group of people - until something happens which falls out of line with their strong beliefs, and they will turn a full 360 and won't have anything to do with the 'offender.'

I read a book recently called “Undivided” by a lady called Vicky Beeching who is a Christian lady with an amazing faith. She was a talented Christian singer and songwriter, particularly big in America. But Vicky had known from a young age that she was gay and for years she kept this secret to herself which eventually led to a nervous breakdown and Scleroderma which had been brought on by the emotional stress of so many years of not being able to confide in anyone about her sexuality as she worked in an industry which vehemently opposed LGBTQ equality. Vicky lived with fear for a long time as revealing who she was would mean the end of her career - and her place in the faith community. This is what shocked me was that when she did bravely come out, Vicky was met with a barrage of disgusting, horrible messages from so called Christian people, some she had known well and counted as friends, and was faced with hate and prejudice; had many doors shut in her face, and completely ostracised by fellow ‘Christians’ who judged her and quoted scripture with vehemence and hate. Vicky lost her career, all of her God given talent which had inspired and lifted so many people as well as Christian friends who all turned their backs in righteous condemnation.

Vicky Beeching honoured God in all she did and as in the reading from Romans, Paul commanded that no one ever should look down upon anyone else, Christians or not. “Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another?” How a person lives and serves before God is between them and God and should do so with a clear conscience if they live in harmony with God's will - and it is nothing to do with anyone else.

Not stoically perceiving that everything is 'black and white' can lead to a deeper understanding of what the Bible is teaching us: to accept, to listen and respect, not to twist what God is saying to suit our own opinions. There's a lot of 'grey' areas out there which should not cause division and persecution as they can be a source of education which enrich our relationships and bring hope for a future of a world where there is love, compassion and equality.

"So then, each of us will be accountable to God." It's how we've lived our life, not how others live theirs. In the Message translation it puts it like this, "So tend to your own knitting, you've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God."

In other words, get your own house in order before judging someone else's.

"As surely as I live" says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So, all will stand with a faithful belief that their life was one which was lived in obedience and pleasing to God alone, and on his standards only, will we be judged.

AMEN