

Date: Sept. 6, 2026

Texts: Psalm 26. 1-8 / Romans 14. 1-12

Title: "Judge Not...?"

Intro -

A certain fellow — whom everyone agreed was a solid, good guy —
wanted a fishing boat more than anything.

Specifically, he had his eye on a center console with an
Evinrude E-TEC G2 outboard motor.

His wife was not so keen on this, citing various and sundry financial obligations
that, in her opinion, should be satisfied first.

He listened with attentive thoughtfulness to his endearing, sensitive wife,
but bought the boat anyway.

Later, sensing her displeasure, he said lamely, "I'll tell you what:

In the spirit of compromise, why don't you name the boat? Okay, hon?"

This was a concession he thought would please her.

(Brilliant...! Problem solved...)

surprisingly... it actually did please her...

- When our thoughtful, sensitive husband later went to the dock to
prepare the boat for its maiden voyage,

he was startled to discover that his wife had named his new boat,
his pride and joy -

"FOR SALE" was boldly painted on the stern...

cf. - for many people - compromise sometimes feels like that's how it works:
not always the outcome we think it will bring...

sometimes - fairly unpalatable (kind of like a cup of lukewarm coffee...)

for many people - "compromise" is a negative word.

To compromise is to display weakness,

Preachers, especially, hate compromise. -

railing against it in sermons where they highlight the danger of
setting aside one's principles and core values in order to achieve
some "lesser goal..."
now... most preachers will acknowledge in a brief comment that
compromise can be a good thing and perhaps even a necessary strategy.
But - having said this, as almost an afterthought,
the pulpit pounding against compromise resumes.

I) Compromise

cf. - of course, they have a point:
No one wants to, or should, sacrifice their fundamental, absolute,
core beliefs on the altar of public opinion.
Nor should anyone surrender their values for the thin veneer of
cooperation or unity.
No one should become comfortable with going along to get along.
but...
is compromise a dirty word...?
it seems it, at least in our world today - it is...
in politics...
in society in general...
(even in the church...)
if you talk of compromise, you are not a true believer, and -
you will be "primaried" and lose your place at the table...
your position of power...
your seat in Congress
and yet...
Paul seems to be telling the Romans (and - telling us...)
that you need to be willing to let go of some things...
you can "rest secure" in your beliefs... your values...
and - at the same time -
express a spirit of generosity

i.e. - what kind of faith, what sort of mindset is it...

that is not afflicted from time to time

by doubts, questions, or - misgivings?

What sort of faith is an unexamined faith?

cf. - per some of luminaries of the church... of our faith...

- Martin Luther, whose willingness to reexamine what he had believed for most of his life led to the Protestant Reformation...

- Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon "Desire of the Soul in Spiritual Darkness," bluntly claimed: "I think, when a man says, 'I never doubt,' it is quite time for us to doubt him, it is quite time for us to begin to say, 'Ah, poor soul, I am afraid you are not on the road at all' ..."

- Pope Francis: "If one has the answers to all the questions — that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself.

The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt.

You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble."

because...

humility is somewhat the precondition for generosity of spirit...

for approaching others...

for relating to and treating with others...

from a place that understands the need to ask if what we think is a "core belief" actually is...

key here = don't get me wrong...

there are absolutely essential core beliefs:

- Jesus is the Son of God...

- Jesus died for our sins...

- God, in Christ, provides hope and peace and promise...

etc.

the problem comes when some folks in the church expand on that, and add:

- a ban on instrumental music, icons, dramas and dancing

- ("Footloose," anyone...) - or...

- what kinds of food you are, or - are not - allowed to eat...

cf. - not an issue we wrestle with today, but -

- rather an important one in Paul's time

- Why...?

II) The Strong and the Weak

the short answer here is that this is not a "Vegan vs Meat-eaters" conflict

- rather - it has to do with where you got your meat in those days

- note - no grocery stores...

- instead - meat came from temples, where animals had been

- sacrificed to "the gods" and - after some clever trickery -

- the gods took the bones and the fat, while the tasty

- parts were left for the people

- so - this was meat that began as an offering to false gods

- and - there were people who were troubled by that

- now... there were also people who thought:

- "gods - schmods..."

- meat is meat, and the temple has no power over me

an essential of the faith...?

- cf. - not so much

- but -

- apparently an important matter to some, so...

- an area where grace... humility... generosity...

- can be shown

cf. - Paul takes a somewhat curious approach here...

- on the surface, does not seem like an approach that would lead to

- compromise... to peace within the body...

- "Don't look down on those whose faith is weak..."

(Who you calling weak...?)
 seems more likely to create... to stoke... a rivalry
 (i.e. - “Hey Paul... we’re right here...”)
 and - truth be told - not too wild about labeled as “weak...”
 and yet...
 by focusing on a peripheral issue, they show themselves to -
 in actuality - be weak in their faith
 and note - Paul speaks not to the weak in this passage, but to “the strong”
 to those he urges to show a willingness not to patronize their
 weaker siblings, but rather to work with them
 to achieve goals they have in common —
 thus allowing for mutual cooperation in the spreading of the gospel.
 cf. - to borrow from a Buddhist metaphor, “weak” Christians
 have a very small, but, of course, sturdy boat.
 It is extraordinarily clean and tidy, and it’s been built according to all the
 conventional specs and regs of the shipbuilding industry.
 This is a boat that will last.
 “Strong” Christians have a big boat. It’s not quite so sturdy and tidy. In fact,
 sometimes, it’s downright messy. With so many people in the boat,
 everyone has their own ideas about this, that and the other thing.
 But what everyone has in common is a joy and love that embraces the chaos.

 Paul’s concern here is about these strong Christians, not the weak ones.
 The weak ones are entrenched. Nothing can be done about them.
 But strong Christians need to be mature to reach out to the weak
 and maintain a connection with them...
 to be welcoming... to choose their battles... and to remember:
 that most things are nonessential issues:
 “Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of
 quarreling over opinions” - because...
 it’s not about us...

rather - it is about God...

- "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord;

so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (vv. 7-8)

so, as sayings go -

who are we to judge...?

(a question Paul raises more than once here...)

this is an impulse we can put aside...

... once we find security in the fact that -

as participants in Christ's resurrection -

we are, for all eternity...

with all confidence...

- the Lord's

(and he will never let us down -

whether we eat hot dogs or salads...

whether we like Gregorian chants or drums and guitars...

whether we're dancing in the aisles or sitting in the pews...)

we are part of community that is formed and bound together

by something much more lasting than our preferences

and predilections -

we are formed and bound together by the love of God

in Jesus Christ -

and that will outlast any fad diet, holiday observance, or

style of worship