



*Just Who Do You Think You Are?*

*Romans 14:1-12 and Matthew 18:21-35*

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First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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Today we are going to consider the difference between “self-righteousness” and “righteousness”.

Earlier this week, at our weekly Lutheran Hillside Village bible study, I asked people, “If you had to explain to a child what “self-righteousness” is, how would you explain it? After a pause they said things like, “A self-righteous person is someone who thinks that they are always right”; “it is someone who makes you feel small”; “it is someone who has a ‘critical spirit’”; “it’s someone who is judgmental.”

Judgmental. Interesting. In a Pew religious research poll said that the number one reason why those “out there” are “inside here” because those “out there” think that those of us who are “inside here” are judgmental! Followed by “prejudiced” and “opinionated.”

In Paul’s letter to the Romans he asked the church “Why do you pass judgment on one another?” (v.10) If one person thinks that they should worship on one day of the week rather than another, or thinks that they should not eat meat because it may have been offered to an idol and therefore eats only vegetables, what difference is it to you? (Side comment, I tell my vegetarian friends, when we are out for dinner, that they might as well order the steak because the cow is already dead and if they don’t eat the steak, it died in vain!) What difference does it make what clothes you wear or prayers you say or songs you sing, if you are doing it to the glory of God?!

Let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another member of the church. (v. 13)

When Peter came to Jesus asking how many times he must forgive a brother or sister in the faith, seven times, Jesus replied, “Not seven times but, now here is where translations differ, seven times seven or seventy times seven.” In other words, don’t count! And then He told them a parable of a king who forgave a servant a debt that could never be paid in a lifetime nor in the lifetime of their children and grandchildren. This forgiven servant, though, when he saw another servant that owed him only a little, threw his fellow servant, and his family into debtors’ prison until every penny was paid. (I never understood how debtors’ prisons work but that is a different story.)

The king called the unforgiving servant to himself and asked what was going on? Didn’t he know or remember how much he had been forgiven?! Why could he not forgive someone else the little that they owed?

When we consider how much “slack” God has cut us in life, when we remember all of the things that we did wrong, all of the ways that we hurt someone else, all of the ways that we were selfish and self-centered and everything else, who are we to hold a debt against someone else?! Just who do we think we are?!

The Righteous, unlike the Self-righteous, know that they are a sinner saved by God’s grace and that grace alone. They know who they are.

Let us then, Paul writes, pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. For the sake of self, do not destroy the work of God. (Romans 14: 19)

Remember, Paul’s words that are on your prayer card for today, “None of us lives unto himself and none of us die unto ourselves; If we live, we live unto the Lord and if we die, we die unto the Lord, so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. (Romans 14: 7-9)

Just who do you think you are?!