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“Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff” **Sermon on Romans 14:1-12**

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Romans 14: 1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to 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. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.’

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

“My dear mother was a worrier,” he wrote. “And she never left the house without imagining she had left a faucet running, the oven on, a door unlocked, and so she sat in church contemplating grim scenarios of flood and fire and robbers when she should’ve been praising God for His watchfulness over us.” (Garrison Keiler)

There is something in the human condition that lets the small stuff become the big stuff and the big stuff becomes the small stuff. Our worries can get the best of us even in this place we call “a sanctuary.” This is the place where we remember, “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.”

It’s big stuff that becomes the small stuff, most often when we go to God in prayer.

We start out big in our prayers. “Oh, holy and omnipotent God, I’m forever thankful for your care and dominion and your power. You created the world and all that is in it. I’m grateful for my wife and children- my children, my children. Has it been three weeks since I’ve heard from my daughter? What’s with that? You raise these things up and give them the best of everything. I would think that’s worth a phone call on the phone plan I’m still paying for. Would it hurt her to use it to give me a call? But now that she’s met Jim, Jim, Jim. Jim, what are your intentions with my daughter? How much does a wedding cost? Can I have a wedding at the church and take up an offering?”

See, this is prayer, this is how fast it goes from the big stuff to the small stuff. I don’t know why it is so difficult to keep our eyes on the big stuff.

Heidi read to you the parable from Matthew about the slave who had the huge, huge, huge, huge debt. Did I mention how big it was? Impossible ever to repay. A slave who owes the Lord a debt. Does that sound a little strange to you? It sounds strange to me. How is a slave indebted to his master? The one who has taken his life? Her life?

I can still hear the testimony of the woman who was enslaved in the sex trade. She had no will and no way. She never owed. She was owed.... her life!.

The parable has a slave owing the Lord a fortune. I don’t know how that could ever happen. But it happens in this parable.

A parable was introduced with the sermon text from last week. Do you remember the sermon from last week? For the handful of you who have forgotten, Jesus talked about when someone in the church sins against you. That’s a “church” word. You don’t use it out in the world, you use it in the church. When a person in the church sins against you.

And Jesus says, “You cancel that person out and wade in your bitterness for the rest of your life.” No, that’s a poor translation. Jesus says, “You go to that person, and you point out the sin.” How hard is that? You point out the sin. But where two or three are gathered, the Lord is there, it’s church, and we can talk it out. If you can’t talk it out, and the person still cannot reconcile or forgive, all is well and good. But if not, you grab a few people and go back again. And if that doesn’t work, you grab a few more, and if that doesn’t work, you grab the whole church. I mean it could be the tiniest sin, but it requires a huge, huge, huge effort. Because the unity of the church is so important! It’s huge!

And to that parable, you heard Peter think that he's making a grand gesture. "Ok, Lord, let's say we do all that, but the person keeps sinning against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

"No," says Jesus, "77 times." And that's huge! Huge! Huge! Deep and wide is the mercy of God. You always forgive! Keep your eyes on the big stuff! Because there was a slave who owed a huge debt and cried out to the Lord, "Have patience with me and I will pay you everything." And because of pity, sympathy, a sadness of understanding, because the Lord could not bear the suffering, the Lord forgave the huge, huge, huge, huge, huge debt.

And that my friends, should be the end of the parable.

But, immediately after being released, the debt-freed slave, instead of being motivated by amazing joy - "I'm free. Come celebrate with me. For I was lost, but now I'm found! I've got my life back!" - No! No joy. Immediately he came upon a slave who owed him just a pittance, and he grabbed him by the neck. "Pay what you owe." "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." Same words. They are the same words. One would think that saying the same words might trigger a memory.

It would have triggered a memory for me.

Take, for example, when the game is over and I'm waiting to get out of the parking lot. I'm with all those people who were on my team in the stadium. We were yelling, cheering, shouting in unison. But, in the parking lot, they're all enemies. Everyone's on the opposing team. It is survival of the fittest.

Just about a month ago, Guy Griffith and I waited an hour in a parking lot together. Have you ever been in a parked car with Guy for an hour? It's not easy. It does wonders for your prayer life. And the prayer is that there is someone kind enough who will release me. "Have mercy on me!"

And suddenly there comes an answer to prayer. "I'll let you out." That is huge! Not for you at the 11:00 service, but for those at the 8:30 service who were packed in her tight because they're going to the Titan's game. They'll get this sermon!

Now comes the memory. For in a moment after I'm released, there will be another person who is praying to be released. And I remember! I'll let that person in. And I know the person behind me who let me in is giving me the thumbs up in appreciation. For you have heard the Word and you are doing the Word. They're watching.

And that makes me feel so good! To live out such a good Word. And the joy that I feel will allow me, in another 30 feet, to let someone else in. It's the kind of guy I am, I'm pretty amazing. But after that, I have freed myself from my redemption. Two is all I'll go. I know how much salvation's worth, it's two. Three? No.

But the slave has no memory, no sense of worth. "Pay you what you owe!" And he throws the fellow slave in prison.

Fortunately, someone saw the whole episode and took down the name and the plate number and reported the whole thing to the Lord.

And what did the Lord do? The Lord ordered that the slave who forgot about the huge, huge, huge amount of grace he received be tortured until he could repay the entire debt.

How much do you torture someone until you call it even? "So, the Lord will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Hammering this one home to us, right?

We have to get this. Yes. If we don't, there's torture.

Unless the Lord remembers. You never give up on forgiveness.

"Don't you remember Lord, you forgave me that debt! You remember! You remember Lord, right? You set me free! I was the one who forgot. I forgot to live my life in thankfulness. I should have forgiven my friend. I forgot, Lord. But you remember! You remember you're a God who is merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. That's who you are! Remember! Remember the big stuff?"

It's all about the big stuff! The sin in the church is that we keep hitting one another with the small stuff. The small stuff causes division. From the moment two or three are gathered, there's a fight over some rather small stuff. It's the sin of the church. Do you remember what Paul said was dividing the church in what I read to you?

Someone was sitting in worship and looked at someone else and said, "Who let these vegetarians into worship?" When you let a vegetarian into worship, it's a slippery slope. No telling where this is going to lead. Next thing you'll know, we'll let women talk, or let Gentiles in, no telling.

We have to be about the big stuff. The God-sized dreams. We have to believe the Word of the Lord. After all, "What can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?" (Romans 8:38)

"Well, I can think of ONE thing, Paul. Vegetarians!"

"I can think of one thing Paul. I have to get home I can't let another one into traffic."

"I can think of one thing Paul. It's the pain she caused me."

"I can think of one thing Paul. It's those people just need to find another way."

"I can think of one thing Paul. She needs to say she's sorry."

"I can think of 7 things."

"I can think of 77 things."

"What can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus?"

"I can think of only one thing, 'nothing.'"

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. How can something so small as nothing, be so big?