



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Weak Days” **Sermon on Romans 14:1-12**

Donovan A. Drake

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Taste and see that the Lord is good; that is our theme for the school year.

Many folks in the world have a bad taste in the Church. My guess: they expected better. My guess: the Church did a better job of conforming to the world rather than being transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that we might discern the will of God- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

I do believe that a Church that knows who it is- the Body of Christ, a Church that seeks the renewing of the mind and becomes more and more reflective of Jesus, I do believe that when the world gets a taste of it, it will be so good that they'll want more than a taste!

And hope will no longer be defined as down-the-road pie in the sky, but answer lived now.

We have an anxious world; let's fill it with some Good News. Let's start turning this thing around. For children and our children's children and for Jesus.

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 slaves 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 for the Lord. Also those who eat, eat for the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain for the

Lord and give thanks to God. For 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 one of us will be held accountable to God.

"Welcome those who are weak in faith...". A word for those who are strong in faith. When I became a pastor, I quickly realized that one of the things I was called to do, aside from teaching and preaching, weddings and funerals, was to get men to go see a doctor. Often a spouse will call and say, "He won't listen to me. Maybe he'll listen to you." Anyway, if you're a man, go to the doctor. So we can postpone your funeral. Anyway, I went to the doctor on Friday afternoon. A yearly heart checkup.

I was first welcomed by a 72-year-old woman whose job it was to do an ultrasound on my heart. When they handed out personality, she got a double portion. I didn't have to guess what she was thinking; it was all out there. She called me "Honey and Sweetie." I don't know how she knew me so well. She asked what I did. I told her. She said, "Are Presbyterians growing or shrinking." I said, "Westminster is doing alright, but our denomination is on the way out." She said, "Why do you think that is?"

I said, "Well, a lot of country churches are going. People have moved." And then I paused and said, "I think there's something we're not being."

She said, "Move your elbow farther under the pillow and take a breath and hold it." She said, "I don't go to church. I should." She said, "You'll never see me in a blue stocking church. You know what that is, don't you?" I wanted to say, "Know it, I live it." I just said, "Yes." Formal, highly structured and ordered, uncharismatic, highly educated. She said, "I'm just an old country girl." A 72-year-old country girl in a white lab coat, holding the latest in sonogram technology that brought warmth to a sterile room; I liked her. I enjoyed her. She was an open book. Real. She made me laugh. I felt better for just being with her.

I liked her so much that I was tempted to be evangelical. That is, I was tempted to invite her to Westminster. I was thinking that I could meet her at the door, and introduce her to the right folks. I don't mean to sound like some of you are the wrong folks. Some of you are the wrong folks for her to meet right off. I would want her to feel comfortable and welcomed. Fit in, and then I would introduce her to the rest of you... Some of the rest of you.

I was tempted to be evangelical; instead, as she went out the door, I said, "Do you spend this much time with all the patients, or is it just because you like me?" And she rolled her eyes, and I heard her laugh down the hall and tell the nurse in the hallway that I was full of it.

She said, "I don't go to church. I should."

She said, "I wouldn't go to one of those blue-stockng churches. You know what that is, don't you?"

Paul says, "Welcome those who are weak in faith."

The way Paul begins this pericope and the way he ends this pericope, I get the sense he really doesn't believe that he's an advocate for this division between strong faith and weak faith. I mean, I don't think he was into drawing the line between vegetarians and cheeseburgers in paradise. No line between "blue stocking" and "I'm just a country girl."

I get the sense that this is Paul using a rhetorical device. A way of pulling the reader in: "Welcome those who are weak in faith...". I mean, what if I said that to you, "Listen to me, we need to do a better job at welcoming those who are WEAK in faith." By saying that, I just labeled you as...

Strong in faith.

And it is great! I know a thing or two about being strong in faith.

If you come to my office, I've got a couple of diplomas to show that I'm strong in faith. Thirty-four years in ministry. Preparing and preaching Sunday after Sunday after Sunday... Some of you are just dragging yourselves back into church after a long summer. Look, I've been here.

Strong faith, and I didn't draw the line. You did!

You advertised for my job, and you said, "We want our next pastor to be strong in the pulpit." "We want someone who is a strong leader." "We want a teacher who will help us grow in our faith."

And after all those people told you, "No," you got me.

The point is that when you start labeling a person or a group of people "Strong in faith," it kind of goes to the head. You think yourself as better than the other. Maybe even holier-than-thou.

Do you believe there are strong-faith people and weak-faith people? The way I see it, in Jesus we all try. Like Peter, strong-faith Peter. "If it is you Lord, command me to come out to you on the water." Peter, such strong faith, to put a foot on water and think he could walk on it! He did! Until he was weak in faith! Sank like his name. Rock. The faith we believe in. The faith we trust in. Is the faith of Jesus Christ: "Oh, Lord, save me!" Peter sank like a stone. Peter faithful... knowing who Jesus is, "You are the Christ." "Blessed are you! And on this rock I will build my church." And 14 seconds later, Jesus says to the rock, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter is this rock! A rock who denies his Lord not just once but three times in one morning before the sun rose.

Was Peter strong or weak in faith? Yes! Paul says it's not about us!

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord, so whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. Sophie says it this way, "There's nothing we can do to make God love us any more and there's nothing we can do to make God love us any less."

We are so loved! So loved. When I came home to my mom and dad's, my mom would make me dark cherry Jell-O with black cherries and whipped cream. Food of the Gods. If you don't know... "Taste and see!" Ambrosia...it was filled with love! It won't taste quite as good as the way my mom made it...

God's love would be like me coming home today and finding Jell-O with black cherries in it slammed full in the refrigerator. Head downstairs to the other fridge, and that one, too, just slammed full of my favorite love. The dining room table had a large sheet pan of dark cherry Jell-O with whipped cream. But I need to change my clothes. I don't want to get cherry stains on my tie.

Beside my bed, in champagne glasses, cherry Jell-O. It's heaven. Head to the walk-in closet. And there, boxes of cherry Jell-O, and stacks and stacks of cans of black cherries. You understand where I'm going? If only we could grasp the "Width and length, height and depth" of Christ's love.

If I could just ask you to do one thing, think about Jesus loving you. And by that I mean you. When you're rockin' it, or when you sink like a stone. That's my boy! That's my girl! That's my love. Know that you are loved.

And then, since you have this love... sometime today or tomorrow or before you die... let someone in on the bounty that you've been bestowed. Bring some cherry Jell-O with whipped cream over to their situation. Just let them have a taste. It will change their life!" It will change the world!

"Why do you think the church is shrinking?" "I said, I think it's because we're missing something."

"She doesn't go to church."

"She called me Honey and Sweetie."

She spent so much time with me, and my heart. I don't think she does that for just anyone. Me... just me!

I got a taste of love... and where two or more are gathered... church! You can't miss it.