

Focus Reading: Romans 14:1-14

Holy God open our ears to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today and always. Amen.

Today's focus reading is a further segment from Paul's letter to the Romans 14:1-14. Paul writes

Do Not Judge Another. Do Not Make Another Stumble.

¹ Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ 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. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Do Not Make Another Stumble

¹³ Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

As I said a few weeks ago, Paul had no particular authority over the Christian communities of Rome; however, he didn't hold back when it came to sharing his growing understanding of God, and God's plan for humanity. Today's passage reinforces Paul's earlier message that it is God's place to judge, not ours, and the challenge that offers each of us when we encounter someone with views that differ to our own.

Life, culture, attitude and experience is diverse. My experience is not necessarily your experience but that doesn't make it wrong. In fact, this attitude of self-righteousness is often at the heart of discord between Christians and in Christian communities. What is important, as Paul reminds us, is the attitude and integrity in which we approach all we do

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It is our responsibility to meet people where they are at. To extend Gospel hospitality even in situations where we might struggle with differences of opinion and experience. I was reminded of that at Staff Reflections last Tuesday morning.

Every Tuesday morning at the Diocesan Office the staff gathers to reflect upon one of the readings for the following Sunday. Staff are rostered to prepare and lead these reflections. There is always a significant insight or learning for us as individuals and as Synod Office staff. As I listened to the reflection this past Tuesday (thank you Marianne) I had what I call one of those 'lightbulb moments.' This passage reminded me profoundly of the role and ministry of Chaplains.

For the past six months one of my ministry hats has been that of Acting Senior Chaplain. It has been a privilege to support the many chaplains, lay and ordained, who serve in a diversity of (often secular) situations across the diocese. They encounter people from every aspect of life and offer a ministry of presence to all. It is not their place to judge a person's actions, or whether their faith or absence of faith is 'right'. Chaplains offer a presence that says 'come' regardless of circumstance.

If all had unfolded as planned this evening, people from across the Diocese of Adelaide would have been gathering in St Peter's Cathedral to celebrate the ministry of the many people who serve as Chaplains across the Diocese.

Unfortunately, COVID19 complications meant that this service has had to be postponed, however, I am going to take the opportunity to talk a little about the blessing our chaplains are to ministry in this diocese.

Often when we think about ministry our perception is that of the local parish or community church served by a professionally trained and ordained clergy person. That is only one piece of the ministry picture. The ministry offered by chaplains is also diverse, professional, requires specialist skills, sits at the cutting edge of community, and for generations has been overlooked and often undervalued.

Chaplains are Lay people, Deacons and Priests, volunteer and paid, serving in places you may not have considered or expected. Each doing so with a heart for the Gospel and the people they serve.

Across the diocese chaplains are serving in schools and hospitals, in tertiary institutions and prisons. They serve in residential aged care facilities, places of work, the defence forces. They support our police, RSL's and disaster relief. They can be found across the wider community, including sports clubs and a local surf living saving club. The list is endless. Where there is a community activity you have the potential for a chaplaincy. They serve quietly and often inconspicuously, solo or as a part of a team, encountering thousands of people of all ages in their many different environments.

One of the significant challenges for many of our chaplains is that they are not permitted to overtly evangelize in the places they serve. As Paul reminds us in today's reading, their role, their ministry is to be a Gospel presence in a diverse world, without condemnation or judgement. This is no easy task.

However, Paul's words remind us all why we serve,

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If 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. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Vision 2022, the Diocese of Adelaide's Mission Action Plan, has made a commitment to strengthen Chaplaincy. To bring it out of the background and ensure it stands strongly alongside what has historically been more visible expressions of God's love and care. With prayer and commitment, and in partnership with AnglicareSA, this is beginning to happen. Thanks be to God.

Please pray for Chaplains everywhere, that they might be equipped with the grace and skills they need to serve in these very public, but often challenging, environments.