

**OPENING PRAYERS AND HOLY COMMUNION ARE AVAILABLE AS A VIDEO HERE**

**PART 1 – OPENING PRAYERS**

**WELCOME**

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

**SENTENCE**

If you, O Lord, should note what we do wrong, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

Psalm 130.3–4

**PRAYER OF PREPARATION**

Let us pray.  
Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name,  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

Lord God, you created this world, and made us in your own image. Forgive us when we turn away from you.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord God, through your Son you overcame evil and death. Rescue us from slavery to sin.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord God, by your Spirit, you restore us to fellowship with you and with one another. Breathe your love and freedom into our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy on you,  
forgive you your sins,  
and keep you in life eternal. Amen.

## THE GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God's people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High  
Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God,  
you call your Church to witness that in Christ  
we are reconciled to you:  
help us so to proclaim the good news of your love,  
that all who hear it may turn to you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## PLEASE PAUSE THE VIDEO

**PART 2** — AN ALL AGE VIDEO PART 10 OF *WHERE IS GOD?* FOCUSING ON FINDING GOD EVEN WHEN WE ARE SICK AND DOWNLOADABLE MATERIAL FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN [HERE](#)

**PART 3** — LOOK UP AND READ THROUGH THE READINGS, LISTEN TO THE [SERMON PODCAST](#) (READ ALONG IF YOU WISH) BY OUR LAY PASTORAL MINISTER, LIBBY PATERSON, AND PRAY THE INTERCESSIONS, TODAY BY REV SUE BROOKS

## READINGS

Romans 14:1-12  
Psalm 103:1-13  
Matthew 18:21-35

Romans 14:1-12

Many decades ago we, as a family, worshipped in a church setting where it was frowned upon to drink alcohol socially. Well, we really enjoy a nice small wine with our evening meals, or in a social setting. In that church environment there was often a judgemental attitude towards issues, that we believed were non faith issues, we felt judged and we eventually left. Nothing like personal experience. In fact, it has been said that “trying to change each other”, is often a “favourite indoor sport of Christians”.

In this morning’s reading from Romans, Paul gives us instruction on how we are to deal with situations, like that, in our lives, a sort of “blueprint” to behaviour, when there are differences. **By way of background:** Paul was writing during a transitional era in religious history when many converts to Christ were passing from one great divine system (the Mosaic regime) to another (the Christian age).

The early church in Rome was small in numbers, and consisted of both Jewish and Gentile Christians, but they had their differences. From afar Paul had an eye on those problems and wished to address them, as ***the potential for disunity, in so young a church, was destabilising, and, as we know, disharmony detracts from unity.***

Paul very clearly instructs them regarding the cultivating of good relationships within the church and it is a salutary lesson for us today, because we all come from different backgrounds equipped and shaped by a multitude of life experiences, and have differing lens on life, including our faith and church matters (but Christ unites us).

Bickering and problems arose because those early Christians could not agree on whether they should be obeying the Jewish Laws. The division possibly arose around issues related to certain ritual requirements of the O/T Law. Some of the Jewish Christians felt convicted to adhere to what they saw as strict rules and regulations, such as, ongoing dietary and ceremonial requirements of the Law. In distinct contrast, the Gentile Christians felt ***no obligation*** to adhere to what they saw as obsolete standards, that were ***fulfilled by Christ.***

The problem was, both parties tried to convince the other how to behave. Each were strongly convicted, believed they were obedient, and held tightly to what they saw a biblical argument to support their view, so they wanted to do what was right. Both parties were being scornful and ***judging each other*** and Paul quite clearly rebukes that behaviour which has the propensity to divide a church. Scornful judgement sows the seeds of hurt and rejection and alienation. Hardly, the components of a healthy church.

The result: so they had differences in the church - what’s new!

In response Paul wrote to them to give the ***truth about the Christian faith***, to dispel false ideas about it. He was also to give ***practical advice*** about how Christians ***should behave to one another***, and to be ***united*** in matters that do not affect the integrity (that is, the honesty and wholeness) of the Christian faith.

We must again remember that this was the church in its infancy, so it was a bit of a “bumpy” road. So, what is this Christian freedom or liberty you may ask? It doesn't mean the freedom or liberty to go and do as we please and not comply to Gods word. ***Freedom from the Law does not mean freedom from Gods moral requirements, that is what is morally right or wrong. Freedom does not mean tolerance towards moral error or sin.***

***No!...Freedom /liberty from the Law means that because we now belong to God by his redeeming us, we are His and we are no longer under the Law, which, is what the Jewish Christians were still observing and adhering to.*** They were not as yet “enlightened” and “were lacking in the fullness of their freedom in God”, and Paul refers to them as “weak”.

This contextual notion of *weakness* refers to those who certainly have faith in God, wish to honour God but who may be *lacking some knowledge* of the *fullness of their freedom in God*, which was purchased by the crucifixion of Christ and reconciliation of relationship the God the Father. In contrast, the “strong”, of whom Paul classifies himself, are those who likewise in faith wish to honour and serve Christ, but who have a “fuller grasp of” and “embrace more of God’s creation”, and feel free of the Law, by justification.

We are told that both groups of Christians, “weak” and “strong” are instructed to be tolerant and loving of the other. Make no mistake, both are godly people, but they are to respect each other and not quarrel over their differences of opinions that are not edifying or divisive. They are to encourage each other.

In essence, Paul’s appeal captures the very heart of what it means to *live as a Christian* (Ch 12; 1-2) when he reminds us to not to be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but to be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind. When we are transformed, we realise and appreciate that we are no longer bound, by the law, but set free.

Paul gives sound counsel. He reminds us to a) to remember to *whom we belong* (Romans 12:8), b) *why we belong to Him* and c) what *responsibility* this gives us. It is our *faith* that conforms and convicts us that we belong to Christ because he died for us, rose from the grave, and now sits at the right hand of God, judging those the Father has called into His church.

Yes, as members of the church we have a serious responsibility. In today’s world we are always hearing of everyone’s rights, but rarely do hear of one’s “responsibilities”. It would seem to be a dated term. The apostle advises us that we have a *responsibility* to live in unity, that we have a responsibility to other Christians, and the responsibility also includes our behaviour towards one another and how to treat one another when we disagree, and not to judge; remembering that to judge means condemn, criticize, separate so as to condemn or to hold at arm’s length.

So consequently, to judge others is to attempt to take the place of God as judge of His people .

James 4: 11 tells us: “My friends, don’t say cruel things about others. God is our judge, and he can save or destroy us. What right do you /we have to condemn anyone (Romans 14: 11-12)? It is God that judges. It is God that receives us all equally (Romans 14:3). So, who are we to condemn someone that God has accepted?

We will each separately give account of ourselves to God according to what *we do- our behaviour and actions* (Romans 14:12). We are to strive with all our being to please Him by living as He lived, and to serve Him and the church and not ourselves. *Judging each other* does not fall into our area of *responsibility*. Living according to the Sermon on the Mount does.

Importantly- we are to judge *ourselves* and live our lives faithfully to God’s call.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the issues that divide us as Christians, are different from those of the first century, but unfortunately, differences often occur which are not faith related, but opinion related. How can we apply Paul’s message to ourselves, today? What are possibly differences or causes of negative attitudes to others.

I can think of several that I have observed in different church settings and traditions. For example e.g. raising of hands during times of worship, clapping of hands, different types of worship music, perhaps people drinking of alcohol, manner of dress, differences in disciplining children or even the ability to tithe (in difficult situations), just to name a few, and you can probably think of others, but at the end of the day, we are all called to respect each other and to live in unity.

These are all matters that should not affect the integrity of our faith or our faith journey. Friends, if we focus on these petty things we don’t focus on Christ and we may forget (as Paul said), “to whom we belong”, and it can be spiritually, emotionally and physically depleting and disrupting.

It is about cultivating harmonious relationships despite our differences.

What is vital is “to do your best and live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18) and to mutually edify each other.

So finally: *what is important is the manner in which we deal with our differences, rather than, the fact that we have differences*, remembering that often actions may be actions of *indifference* and *not* of faith.

The goal is unity, which is Pauls very point and the overall good of the church is the highest goal.

**Our behaviour or business is to please God. That is true Christianity, which makes Christ all in all. Though Christians are of different strength, capacities and practices in (lesser) things, yet they are all the Lords, and he will judge them. All are looking to serve and please God, we just sometimes do it differently.**

**Let us Pray:**

**Dear Father God; We pray that You will help every member of the Church to live in harmony with each other. May we be united in love and enable us to pray with the mind of Christ, to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to glorify you with heart, voice and righteous behaviour. Keep us from distracting differences and may our lives be a witness of Your love, not only in what we say, but all that we do. Lord, help us develop respect for the personal opinions and consciences of others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen**

## **INTERCESSIONS BY REV SUE BROOKS**

Merciful and gracious God, you are slow to anger and abound in steadfast love for your People: hear the prayers your people offer.

We pray for the healing of your wounded world, for the end to ancient feuds, and for the process of reconciliation in our own land:

where there is suspicion, bring trust;

where there is hostility, bring peace;

where there is injury, bring justice;

Forgiving God, help us to bring your reconciling love to the world, and in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the healing of your wounded church, for the end of division and the progress of ecumenical conversation and cooperation;

where there is error, bring truth;

where there is hurt, bring forgiveness;

where there is exclusion, bring welcome.

Forgiving God, help us to bring your reconciling love to the world, and in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the healing of our wounded community, for the well-being of all who are disregarded and forgotten:

where there is neglect, bring concern;

where there is hardship, bring relief;

where there is despair, bring hope.

Forgiving God, help us to bring your reconciling love to the world, and in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

We pray for the healing of your wounded people, for the release from suffering of body, mind and spirit:

where there is pain, bring comfort;

where there is sorrow, bring consolation;

where there is abuse, bring repentance and care.

Forgiving God, help us to bring your reconciling love to the world, and in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Merciful and gracious God, we remember your good and faithful people, who, through the ages, have brought your reconciling love to the world. Help us to follow in their footsteps, that, when we stand before your judgement seat, we too shall be found acceptable in your eyes and enter your eternal presence. Forgiving God, in your mercy  
Hear our prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

**PLEASE RESUME THE VIDEO FOR HOLY COMMUNION**

**GREETING OF PEACE**

We are the body of Christ.  
His Spirit is with us.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
And also with you.

**OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.  
Accept and use our offerings for your glory  
and for the service of your kingdom.  
Blessed be God for ever.

**HOLY COMMUNION**

The Lord be with you,  
And also with you.  
Lift up your hearts;  
We lift them to the Lord.  
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God  
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right to praise you, faithful God, always and everywhere, for with your only begotten Son and life-giving Spirit, you are the one true God from everlasting to everlasting.  
At the dawn of time you wrought from nothing  
a universe of beauty and splendour, bringing light from darkness and order from chaos.  
You formed us, male and female, in your image,  
and endowed us with creative power.  
We turned away from you but you did not abandon us.  
You called us by name and searched us out,  
making a covenant of mercy, giving the law, and teaching justice by the prophets.  
And so we praise you, joining with your faithful people of every time and place, singing the eternal song:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.

When the fullness of time was come, you sent your Son to be born of Mary. Bright image of your glory, he learnt obedience to you in all things, even to death on a cross, breaking the power of evil, freeing us from sin, and putting death to flight.  
You raised him from death, exalting him to glory, and the new day dawned.  
On the night he was betrayed your Son Jesus Christ shared food with his friends, his companions on the way.  
While at table he took bread, blessed, and broke it,  
and giving it to them, said: 'Take, eat; this is my body.'  
He took a cup of wine, and, giving thanks, he gave it to them, and said, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Do this in remembrance of me.'

**Christ has died,  
Christ is risen,  
Christ will come again.**

**Therefore, living God, as we obey his command,  
we remember his life of obedience to you, his suffering and death, his resurrection and exaltation,  
and his promise to be with us for ever.**

**With this bread and this cup we celebrate his saving death until he comes.**

**Accept, we pray, our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and send your Holy Spirit upon us and  
our celebration that all who eat and drink at this table**

**may be strengthened by Christ's body and blood to serve you in the world.**

**As one body and one holy people, may we proclaim the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ our  
Lord, through whom, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours,  
eternal God, now and for ever. Amen.**

#### **THE BREAKING AND SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE**

**We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.**

**We who are many are one body,  
for we all share in the one bread.**

#### **POST COMMUNION PRAYER**

**Gracious God,  
we thank you that in this sacrament  
you assure us of your goodness and love.  
Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving  
and help us to grow in love and obedience  
that we may serve you in the world  
and finally be brought to that table  
where all your saints feast with you for ever.**

**Father,  
we offer ourselves to you  
as a living sacrifice  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work to your praise and glory.**

#### **BLESSING**

**The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge  
and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and  
remain with you always. Amen.**

#### **DISMISSAL**

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
In the name of Christ. Amen.**