

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI

Pastor Mark Gartner

Sermon for Pentecost 17 – October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### **Romans 14:5-9**

**One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.**

**For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Amen

In the 1930's, entertainer Bud Abbott met a comic named Lou Costello and together they formed a partnership and comedy team that became legendary. Together in partnership, these two men were able to achieve success that likely they could not have achieved on their own. One of the reasons that this partnership was so successful is that each man understood his own role and valued that of the other. In fact, when they formed their partnership, Costello requested that all profits be split 60/40 in favor of Abbott. Their mutual respect for each other and lack of selfishness helped them to form a successful partnership that lasted for many years. Compare that to Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. They too formed a partnership becoming one of the most popular twosomes in America. They made 16 films together. But they broke up their act in 1956 because each man felt he lived in the other's shadow. Neither was willing to share the stardom with each other. Partnerships are important aspects of our lives. We can always do more together than we can alone. Partnerships can multiply the work that is done. The way that people treat each other in a partnership is key to the success of that partnership.

We are here today because of a partnership—the partnership that we have with the Lord through Jesus our Savior. Through Jesus life, death and resurrection with the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we have been brought into a partnership with our Lord. We have become his people, citizens of his kingdom, with the certainty of salvation ourselves and partners in the mission of our Savior for more people to know of his love for them. Our common faith in Jesus has brought us into another partnership—the partnership that we share together here at St. Luke's Lutheran Church and TSL School. What a neat picture that is to see ourselves as partners together with each other with the mission to further the kingdom of God by using his Word to strengthen those who believe in him and to reach out to those who don't yet know him. We don't usually think of ourselves as partners. We usually think of ourselves as members, which carries the thought of an organization which brings exclusive privileges where we can go and hang out.

What if we stopped thinking of ourselves as members and start thinking of ourselves as partners in the mission work of our Savior? This is really the biblical model for God's people. We are working here at St. Luke's to lay out a plan for ministry. What if each one of us saw each other as partners with each one of us owning a share or a stake in this mission? We can do so much more together than we can alone. We invite you to partner with us in this ministry with your prayers, your participation and leadership in ministry activities, and with your offerings. Each one of us has the opportunity to participate and make investments of time and money in ministry that will change lives and eternal destinations. We are a living organization that is carrying out the winning cause of God's mission here on earth.

God's Word today guides us in our partnership with each other as we strive to carry out this mission. God shows us how we can work and serve together to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom by showing his love to each other. God's Word today tells us,

### **Sermon Theme: Work As Partners!**

- 1. Saved by the same Lord**
- 2. Living in the same freedom**

In this partnership that we share, there are some things that are set in stone—the message of our Savior and the mission that he has given to us. In each of these areas, there is nothing gray. There is no flexibility. There is no opportunity for us to tweak, change, pick or choose. The message that God gives to us in scripture is the message to which we are bound. The mission of using our lives and resources to preach God’s Word to strengthen believers and reach out to unbelievers to share with them the love of our Savior cannot change. In our text, Paul is not talking about either of these. He is talking about “adiaphora.” These are the things that are neither forbidden nor commanded by God. While neither the message nor the mission can or will change, God has given us flexibility in the administration of this work. In other words, we have the freedom to decide how best to carry out that work in our individual settings. For instance, God wants us to worship him. It is his will that we gather regularly with fellow believers around his word and bring our songs of praise to him. But God has not set before us the specific forms or style that we are to use in doing that. We have freedom to sing different types of songs in different styles (of course as long as the message matches that of God in his Word) in different formats. Or while God brings us together in congregations for the purpose of carrying out his mission together, he does not set laws in scripture about how our ministry structures are to be set up. We have freedom to organize the work differently in each situation so that we can best and most efficiently carry out the work he has given to us and meet the needs that are before us.

Of course, with this freedom, comes difference of opinions. And as sinful humans, it is often these different opinions that can cause great hurt and difficulty in carrying out ministry. The tendency for us is to be very selfish in our thoughts—to look out for ourselves and do whatever is best only for us, push our own agendas regardless of the thoughts of anyone else, trample on the toes of everyone else to do what we think is the best. Plain and simple, the tendency that we have is to be very selfish in this process. We use the excuse of our Christian liberty to do whatever we want and in the process crush the spirit and service of our fellow Christians.

This is sin. And sin does nasty things to partnerships. It ruins them. Sin is what ruined the partnership that God established with mankind in the Garden of Eden. Sin causes stress and tension in our partnerships with each other and it destroys our partnership with God. These unloving actions not only hinder the mission and work of God’s church, they bring eternal condemnation on the one who commits it. This is why the love of God is so amazing. Though we destroyed the partnership God established with us in Eden, God re-established that partnership through the life, death and resurrection of his Son. Though undeserved and completely one-sided, God acted on his own to restore our relationship with him. And in this partnership, he continues to show amazing patience, understanding and acceptance with us as we continue to act in ways that are often still very unloving. We have heard in our other lessons for today how God continues to show forgiveness to us day after day. Never is there a day God doesn’t forgive our sins as we lay them before him. As we gather in worship, never is there a day that God doesn’t offer his absolution to us as we confess our sins and the punishment that we deserve from him. God always in love points us to Jesus our Savior and the sacrifice that he made on our behalf. He doesn’t destroy us in our sins but is patient with us, offers his forgiveness, continues to guide us in his word and strengthens us to live as his people.

It is this love of Christ that God shows to us in the partnership he established with us that we are to show in our partnership with each other. On the one hand, we have Christian liberty in how we go about things, but on the other hand we are to show Christian love with each other as we work together in our partnership. Martin Luther had a very memorable phrase that helps us to understand this very well: “The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; and the Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” What a beautiful way of putting it. We have freedom in Christ. But we dare not ever let our freedom in Christ destroy someone’s faith or the unity that we share together in our Savior. Unity of believers as we carry out the mission of our Savior Jesus to preach his message to our world is the strongest evidence that there is love among us.

What helps us to keep that unity? Remember what the goal and purpose of our work is and trust that God’s people are working together to carry that out. Paul shares that goal (v.7-8), **“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”** We remember that in everything, we belong to the Lord and so do our fellow Christians. As we are trying to serve him in everything that we do we trust that

our fellow believers are doing the same. We don't accuse each other of trying to get something over on us or forcing something on us. Nor do we automatically assume that people are trying to go against what God says. God wants us to take words and actions in the kindest possible way. He wants us to talk in love to each other and he wants us to trust each other. Trust of our fellow brothers and sisters is of the utmost importance! Paul reminds us that we are not here for ourselves. We are here to serve God and carry out his work. No matter what we do—here at church, in our families, at work—we do it for the Lord out of thanks and praise for all that he has done for us.

Paul gives the example in our text where two people are doing different things both in service to the Lord. Those who had formerly been of the Jewish faith had been brought up that Saturday was the day of the Lord, the special day of the week dedicated to the Lord. Now in Christian freedom, the Christians were starting to worship on Sunday and recognized that every single day of our lives is to be a special day of worship to God. This freedom gives Christians the opportunity to worship on any day. Sunday has become a customary day for worship, but not because God has ordered that. If we go to our worship service on Thursday, we go to that just as joyfully and gladly as we do on Sunday morning. If one person was so accustomed to Sunday that for them Sunday was the only day to worship, those of us who know the liberty that we have ought not to look down on him and call him a sinner. Nor is the person who is accustomed to worship on Sunday to call those who go to church on another day a sinner. Here both are doing what they are doing for the Lord. One might be weaker in his knowledge and one may be stronger, but both are striving to serve the Lord. In areas of life where God has not commanded, we ought not to stand in judgment of others and condemn them as sinners. Nor are we to run over them with our Christian freedom. In matters involving adiaphora, the issue lays in the conscience.

These are important points and guidelines for us to keep in mind as we look to expand the ministry that we are carrying out. We are partners together in ministry. Christ is our Lord. He is to rule, guide, govern, and direct every thought and action. In matters where Christ has not spoken, our guide is this: being able to say, "What I am doing is for the Lord." And as partners, we trust that each of God's people are following this directive. As we look at new ways of doing things and look at new things that we might do, we don't spend our time complaining, lamenting, scolding or whining about people who do things differently. Let's keep in mind this motivation to do what we do to give thanks to God, bring him glory for what he has done in Jesus, and do what we can to further his kingdom. We are Christ's witnesses here on earth and our primary goal is to share the gospel. In all that we do as partners together, we do the best that we can to share Christ in nurture and outreach. As partners, let's invest in the work of the Lord that will change lives and eternities. Let's treat each other with the love of Christ as we carry out this work. Give each other the trust and the respect that your brothers and sisters are being guided by God's Word and doing what they can to best carry out the mission of the Lord. Be ready to forgive rather than to jump on each other. Give each other the benefit of the doubt. Work together as partners, people who each have a stake in this eternal work. Work as Partners in the Lord. Amen.