

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

September 17, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Exodus 14: 19-31

Responsive Reading; Psalm 103: 1-13

Epistle Reading; Romans 14: 1-12

Gospel Reading; Mathew 18: 21-35

Sermon; Title:

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Judge not that you shall not be judged.

Will it matter ten years from now? If the toilet paper roll has the paper coming over the top or coming out from the back along the wall? Will it matter ten years from now? And if you have a strong opinion can you adjust if someone shows a good reason for a differing belief? OSHA says the toilet paper roll must be within thirty-six inches of the toilet seat and come over the top opposite the wall. Great! What if you have a cat that will completely unroll the tissue paper by pawing at it if it is hung that way? If you are an OSHA complier you might want to

rethink the situation. Will it matter ten years from now if you have required your guests to remove their shoes in your house or will it cause Uncle Joe to avoid coming to visit because he has a bad back?

This may sound foolish but stuff like this can actually destroy a marriage and in Romans we see that it can even divide a church family.

Paul uses the question of eating meat to point out this problem. If people believe in God, and believe that Jesus died to ransom us from our sins, why should it matter if they have different eating habits? Who are we to criticize a true believer? If we eat only vegetables, we thank the Lord for those veggies. If we eat meat, we thank God for that meat. Either way we are thanking God for His gifts.

How about working on Sunday? Exodus 20: 8-11 says Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all you work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Then in the New Testament Jesus says, “Where does it say you shall not do good on the Sabbath?” Jesus goes on to say that certain things must be taken care of when they happen, i.e. the Ox in the pit scenario? Heck no! God will honor both types if they do so to do the will of God. It is OK to take Sunday off and it is OK to work so someone else can take Sunday off. Don’t sweat the small stuff.

OK, what is the “Big stuff”?

Romans 8 and on says that if we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord, and that either way we are the Lord’s. If Christ died and rose that He might be the Lord of the living and of the dead, why should we be so petty as to judge or show contempt for our brother? Christ doesn’t, for it is written: “As I live, says the Lord Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”

Our Psalm lesson tells us how great God is and that He does so much for us that honoring Him any way we can is our assigned task in life. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.”

We must not have a double standard. If we expect God to forgive us, then we should be willing to do the same for others as they are creatures created by God, and God does not make junk.

In our gospel Peter is trying to look like a good guy and offers to forgive someone who wrongs him seven times. Christ says that is not even close. We as flawed humans mess up time and time again and we still want our Lord to give us another chance. The only way we have to show God that we are serious in our repentance is to show a willingness to forgive others who have actually wronged us. There is no limit to what God can and will do for us. "For with God, all things are possible."

I saw a Facebook post that said, "God did not remove the Red Sea, He provided a way through it." It is a shame that so many Christians doubt the actual truth of the parting of the Red Sea. If all things are possible with God why do we doubt the Red Sea incident, and if we doubt any of God's miracles, are we really doubting not only the ability of God but actually the very existence of God?

Personally, I do not dismiss the idea that maybe the writers of the Bible embellished the facts to honor God but I also will never say that the miracles depicted could not have really happened just as they are portrayed.

So, I guess what I am saying is that we should not judge others or God. It is said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and, I say, “Don’t do unto others that which you would not want done unto you.”

Don’t sweat the small stuff, and everything is “small stuff” with God.

Hallelujah and Amen!

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