

## Romans 14: (1-)-7-9(-13) - 3<sup>rd</sup> last Sunday. 6.11.2016

### *Living for the Lord*

<sup>7</sup> For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, it's to honour the Lord. And if we die, it's to honour the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Christ died and rose again for this very purpose – to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. [NLT]

Where do you belong? Who are you? What defines you? [If you were asked to fill in a questionnaire, how would you respond?]

For many it may be their culture that plays an important role, and observing certain customs is non-negotiable for them. For others culture plays a lesser role - they may define themselves in terms of where they live, whom they associate with, even their work, and again there are certain customs that must be observed, if you are to stay part of the group.

Who are you? What defines you? Paul reminds us again that our identity has been changed. The question you must answer today is whether you have accepted your new identity, and to

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Life is about making choices - that becomes clear when you travel to a certain destination. You may, e.g., want to go to Cape Town to take part in the Argus next year. What is the most important thing for you to do? - To get there on time! The event takes place on 12<sup>th</sup> March next year, but you would be too late if you only arrived in Cape Town on that day - even if you were at the start at the time you were allotted. To be on time you have to be in Cape Town at the latest by Saturday in time to register and to receive your race number.

I don't know of anyone who has trained for the Argus for months, who has dreamt of riding this race, who would then make choices along the route to Cape Town which would prevent him/her from being there at the start fresh and rested. There are different routes you can follow to get to Cape Town - you can fly, you could possibly even take a shipping cruise there -, but the

important thing is being there on time.

Making choices - we do so every day, often without being really aware of it. What determines the choices we make? Paul wants us to understand here that as people who have been made the Lord's by the fact that **Christ died and rose again for this very purpose**, our life's journey is to be determined by the fact that we get to the destination - on time!

In Rome Paul was addressing a group of Christ followers who belonged to at least two distinct groups: those who were of Jewish descent, and those who were not. The question was not so much what they did in terms of their religious observances, but why they did it.

In the verses leading up to our passage Paul speaks about those who follow certain dietary rules or observe certain days - while others did not. Those who had grown up in Jewish homes often carried on with their observance of how to prepare food, and what to avoid - almost without thinking. They - again almost automatically - observed certain days, and there may have been some for whom the Sabbath still remained the day on which to 'go to church'.

On the other hand there were the others who attached little importance to whether they ate bacon for their breakfast, and how their food was prepared was not subject to certain rules. They may have felt that Sunday was the day to 'go to church', and that the long list of festivals had nothing to do with them.

I'm sure you can imagine that these 2 groups struggled to live together in peace. So it is not a surprise when we read in the verse following directly after our passage ends: **So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer?**

We do not only define ourselves in terms of what we do - but we also judge others, look down on them, in terms of what they do or do not do! This may be in terms of a cultural identity where we do the things we learnt growing up - and so often we may say that the others 'don't understand' our culture so they have no right to ask questions about them.

Making choices - and making sure that these choices are properly informed!

Paul says that those who had practised their dietary observances, who had kept certain days as special days could keep on doing so. Those who did not have this 'cultural' background were free not to do so. Wait, is that not a cop-out?! Is that not what the problem is with the church so often that it does not give clear guide-lines on what to do, and what to avoid?

But Paul adds an important part to all of this. In terms of the life-journey it's like saying: Make sure you get there on time. He says, **For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it's to honour the Lord. And if we die, it's to honour the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.**

Christ has made us his people - and now this new identity must define us. It does not matter how you celebrate Christmas - not even if you insist on putting up your Christmas tree at the beginning of December. What is important is that we **honour the Lord** by what we do. It does not matter if you expect lobola for your daughter's marriage, what counts that in this practise you **honour the Lord**. It does not matter if want to attend the Oktoberfest - and eat lots of pork, and wear a 'Lederhose' or Dirndl -, if you do it to **honour the Lord**. You may observe Valentine's Day, and any other of these days which seem to owe much to their ability to be money-making - even Halloween -, if the purpose you do it for is to **honour the Lord**.

That is the choice for us to make: is who we are, and what we do determined by our culture, by the way we have 'always done things in this family'? Or does Christ not only change the destination we can hope for, but also the way we live as we journey to this destination by living to **honour the Lord**?

This question does not only have to do with the 'social aspects' of life, but also with those that have to do with our 'religious observances'. We don't have any laws about how to practise our services - other than the 'law': 'But we've always done it this way'! Or it may be: 'That's the way we Lutherans do it'. [One can almost visualise Paul raising an eyebrow when we proudly call ourselves 'Lutheran', and asking, 'So Luther saved you'? (Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:13)]

The basis of our services is the structure we have - something that Luther took

over from the services he had grown up with. His practise of doing this was informed by the dictum: 'Keep what is good'. And what exactly is 'good'? For one thing - as opposed to most other churches in the reformed family - our pastors still wear robes. Is this done simply because it's a tradition? As to our services: How exactly we fill the framework of the order of service is not to divide people - some may choose to have it one way all through the year, while others have some variety in the way they celebrate the service. Some have projectors, while others choose not to use them. The important thing in all of this is, that we do what we do to **honour the Lord**.

The same may apply to all the talk in the 'reformed group of confessions' which is readying itself to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. What is the purpose of all that is being done? Who is being glorified by the celebrations? We may think that this is of course being done to **honour the Lord**, but we need to take a close look at what is at the centre - because the choice we make here, may also indicate where we are heading.

Where do you belong? Who are you? What defines you? As we continue on the journey of life, let's make sure that we do not get distracted along the way, by things which may detain us - and so prevent us from getting to the destination on time. Christ has called us to be his - and he is with us on each day as we live for his glory.