

**Meditation on Community Life: Romans 14: 1-12 (paraphrase)**

*Paul took the "Jesus Movement" all across the Roman Empire in the First Century CE. He brought the message of the Risen Christ to people and places far away from the Jewish communities where Jesus lived and taught. People of diverse practices and backgrounds around the Mediterranean world were drawn to new communities founded by Paul. Conflicts often arose in those communities about what constituted faithful practices: was it necessary for a Gentile follower of Jesus to first become a Jew, and follow Jewish Law? Or, could a Gentile follow Jesus without first adopting a Jewish way of life, including dietary practices and Sabbath observance? These conflicts were serious, and could potentially tear communities apart. In his letter, Paul does not take a side. Instead, he encourages all in the community to keep eyes on what is important: faithfulness to Jesus, thanksgiving to God, leaving judgment to God. Within this view, many different ways of following Jesus are possible.*

*Our issues may be different in the 21<sup>st</sup> C, but Paul's process still has much to recommend it.*

One: Welcome those who differ,  
but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions:  
Some believe in eating anything,  
while others eat only vegetables!  
Those who eat must not despise those who abstain,  
and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat;  
**People:***Out loud, but muted*  
**for God has welcomed all.**

Some judge one day to be better than another,  
while others judge all days to be alike.  
**People:** *Out loud, but muted*

**All: Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.**

Those who eat, eat in honor of Christ,  
while those who abstain, abstain in honor of Christ:  
**People:***Out loud, but muted*  
**All: And all give thanks to God.**

One: We do not live to ourselves,  
**People:***Out loud, but muted*  
**All and we do not die to ourselves.**

If we live, we live to Christ,  
and if we die, we die to Christ:  
**People:***Out loud, but muted*  
**All: So then, whether we live or whether we die,  
We belong to Christ.**

One: For to this end Christ died and lived again,

to be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your family or friends?

Why do you despise them?

**People:***Out loud, but muted*

**All:****For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.**

One:For it is written, "As I live, says the Holy One, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

**People:***Out loud, but muted*

**All:****So then, each of us, accountable to God.**

### **Invocation**

Compassionate-One, Lover-of-Goodness, Patience-with-Sinners,  
Draw near to us.

Surround us with confidence in your good news:  
that you love us as parents love their children;  
that your mercy is boundless and generous,  
that you beckon us always and will wait forever  
as we find our way back to you.

Open our hearts to receive your compassion;

And then show us how to forgive,

So that we may be vessels of resurrection hope in our troubled world.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

### **Prayer of Confession**

Friends, in the scriptures, "Seven" is often seen as a perfect number,  
a mystical number, a number that points to infinity.

So when Jesus tells his disciples to forgive "seventy times seven",

(or "seventy-seven times" depending on translation),

he is inviting people into a never ending, expansive dance of grace.

Confession, repentance, turning one's life around to a transformed future;

Forgiveness, resilience, opening one's life to a new moment in relationship:

all this may seem impossible, and yet Jesus calls us to profound,  
ever-evolving change.

Let's take a few moments to ponder our lives,  
personal, and in wider community.

Where do we need forgiveness? Where do we need to forgive?

Where do our lives intersect in the wider community

with structures, practices, attitudes that deeply hurt our neighbors?

Where must we seek forgiveness?

Where must we seek to effect change?

How have we been wounded with structures, practices, attitudes  
of the wider community that need transformation?

How may we begin to forgive?

*Silence*

### **Assurance of Grace**

Holy One,

You call us into this ever expanding dance of grace;

Turning “seventy times seven” is not too much when we follow your lead  
into a future of hope and peace.

Glory be to the One who, working in us,  
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. **Amen.**

### **Call To Offering**

Like Paul, who was showered with an abundance of mercy from God,  
we too have been blessed.

Like Paul, we are called to go forth  
and witness to the presence of Christ in our lives  
in so many diverse ways.

One of the ways in which we tell the story is through the giving of gifts to God.

In our gift-giving we participate with God  
in providing for the needs of God’s people.

### **Dedication**

**People:** *Out loud, but muted*

**May our gifts become symbols of our intention  
to minister with God to  
satisfy the needs of those whom God loves.**

### **Scripture, Sermon**

**Benediction:** Let us go forth to forgive as we have been forgiven: seventy times seven!  
freed of the paralyzing burden of sin in order to  
do justice, love mercy, walk confidently, and humbly, with God.

**Amen.**

**Service Prayers for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost** are written by the Rev. Susan A. Blain, Minister for  
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