

"Your welcome to worship"
Romans 14
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Christ Lutheran Church Norfolk, NE
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Dear friends, Rules, Rules, Rules. We can't keep track of all the rules. How many times do you skip over the fine print? Do you have someone else do your taxes or do you get a headache figuring it out? Do you look at the handbook, or just look when you violate something? There are so many rules in the world, it just gets exhausting to keep track of it all.

Kids or even adults might find it frustrating to make sure they are following all the rules of what to wear and what not to wear. Role your jeans, don't role your jeans. Have holes in your jeans; don't have holes in your jeans? Skinny jeans, or boot cut bell-bottom jeans? Who knows on any given month, maybe even any given week. That was so last year. What, did that change on Jan. 1. I missed the memo. Who even makes those rules anyway? No wonder some parents want uniforms.

These unwritten rules are the worst. I was driving going south on riverside in Norfolk trying to turn left. Apparently if there is a line of on coming cars turning right, you are expected to turn left and everyone knows to drive in their respective lanes. It wasn't long before I got a honk from behind from someone who probably makes that turn everyday. Sometimes you just have to learn those unwritten rules the hard way.

When Martin Luther investigated the rules he found something disturbing. Who was making the spiritual rules? People, not God. The church, not God. Political rulers, not God. And finally the whole of society, not God.

Many of the rules revolving around forgiveness were based on man made rules. The rules were actually man made rules. Many of them were set up that way because when the Jews lost their political power, they could no longer enforce ceremonial laws. By the time the Catholic Church came around in the time of Luther, The Christian church regained political power and influence, therefore new rules could be established across Europe. One problem though. New man made rules were established.

Luther realized this with the sale of indulgences that was not found in the Bible. Luther was able to convince his followers that these rules were wrong and not based on scripture. But Luther had to be careful, because as he challenged these rules people were looking for something from him. A whole new set of rules.

So it was for the early church. So it was for Jesus. It was true. Since Christ came, all of the ceremonial laws of the former days were null and void. Sacrifices, now unnecessary. Observing festivals even Passover, now unnecessary. Observing the Sabbath day, no longer necessary.

Why? Because those rules were merely a shadow of the things to come. Jesus was the sacrifice. Jesus saved us by the blood on the cross, and no longer the

blood on the doors in Egypt. And finally Jesus gave eternal rest by giving us eternal life through his resurrection.

What do we sacrifice in our lives to follow Jesus? How often should we receive the Lord's Supper? What days do we set aside to observe this new found rest? Does it have to be Sunday? Jesus and the Bible leave these questions unanswered. Now, You choose what's best for you.

That feels like too much freedom. Believe it or not, it's true. we don't have to follow any rules about what day and how often and what you're supposed to do. It makes me really nervous to suggest you can do whatever you want in regards to the way you worship God. At this moment I'm trying my hardest not to give you really good advice about how to live your life of worship to God. Right now, as a pastor, I would really like to suggest some good answers to those questions. But for the sake of the point of this sermon, I will tell you nothing.

What does the Bible say? He who eats bacon and gives thanks to God does a good thing. He who eats vegetables and has a pet pig, pet cow, and pet chicken. Good for him! He can thank God for his pets.

But don't steal his bacon. And don't kill his pets and eat them. That would be a mess. God would rather us live at peace with one another. Have you ever heard this expression, "That is between me and God." In this case, it's true. Have you ever heard someone say, "I am free to choose what I think best." In this case, it is true. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I will do whatever feels like the right thing to do." In this case also true. And here is the most shocking of all, "What's right for me is right for me, and what's right for you is right for you." In this context those words actually hold true.

Now those words are frequently misused as a license to do anything, and I mean anything you want. God does set up boundaries. If you look at the new testament and the teachings of Jesus they hold consistent with the ten commandments.. God is not saying we should through complete caution to the wind and rebel against authorities. God wants us to obey our authorities for the sake of good order.

In school we have to follow certain rules. As citizens we have to follow certain rules. I might even get pulled over by the police for holding up traffic. But God operates in a very different way. He isn't concerned about nitpicking every single thing you do. He wants to give you as much freedom as possible. Actually God would have you follow just one rule. Love God. That's the one rule, and we can love God in billions of different ways.

The biggest sin we have to watch out for is when we become the sin police. We make up rules about when people and how people should do what. In our own book of concord we find an interesting rule about how there should not be a rule. It says in the formula, "We reject and condemn as wrong when it is taught that when ceremonies, ordinances, and institutions are violently forced on the community of God as necessary, contrary to its Christian freedom, which it has in outward things."

We must not bind people to do things they don't have to do. We should not force people to do things the way we think is best. These matters are called *Adiaphora*. That is just a fancy word that means stuff that can go one way or the other. Those things still matter, but which way we do them doesn't.

God doesn't care what days you set aside or observe. He doesn't actually make it a rule you have to do anything special on Christmas or Easter. And no one really knows anyway when Jesus was born or when exactly he rose from the dead. But that doesn't mean that we definitely shouldn't observe Christmas and Easter. God isn't making any rules either way.

It's just our job not to be the efficient police. I have tried to take about 7 different routes to get to Lutheran High from my house. Multiple test runs took place and were timed to determine the best route. I could argue the absolute best route based on traffic flow and many other variables. Is my way the best? Well yes, yes it is. Does that mean I need to convince everyone of that. Absolutely not. And dare I say in this context all roads lead to the same place.

In the same way, we should not judge other people because we think they are not doing things right. God will be the judge. Jesus is the judge, and thanks be to God the judge is the one who allows us to stand before God.

Jesus allows us to stand before God at the end of the world and give an account of the ways in which we worshipped the true God. And Jesus allows us to stand before the judgment seat with sins completely forgiven. We really don't have a choice every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. So your welcome, you're welcome to worship now, your welcome to worship in whatever way feels right to you. That is really hard for me to say, but it's true.

The worst thing that could happen is to say you have to wear your clothes a certain way so you can go to heaven. Believe it or not, that was happening during the time of Luther. At the same time, the Bible gives guidance on not becoming obsessed with physical appearance and also gives directions to dress modestly.

Still, it's a pretty gray area when it comes to fashion. And oddly enough, God allows for the gray areas in the outward things. He allows us in a way to color even outside the lines. Some are weaker; some don't understand as well, some live their lives in a less than good way. But these are the people, those exact people that God welcomes. And yes, those are the exact people we should welcome too. Amen.