

# Passing Judgement

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Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

- [ 0 : 00 ] We're the Fish Fry Host and Runner. A welcome gift is available for new visitors and can be picked up at the Connections site in the back of the sanctuary following worship.
- Fill out your friendship card too, get on the mailing list, sign up for activities, list any prayers or concerns, and any notes for the staff. Welcome to our church!
- And we do welcome you to church. There's a couple of clipboards going around which are to help with a couple possibilities if you're interested for ministry. One is if you want to sponsor our bulletins or flowers, and the other is for our fish fries.
- We serve 586 fish fries people came for dinner last Friday, which was a great event, and we're glad to have so many people help out. So if you'd like to be part of the fish fries, there's a clipboard going around that you can sign up on.
- If you like the musical worship, the gathering, that normally meets the third Sunday, which this is the third Sunday, they're going to meet next week. So you can mark your calendar for that. They'll be meeting next week.
- [ 1 : 03 ] If you're looking for a Bible study, this Wednesday we're beginning a Bible study in 1 Corinthians on Wednesday at 7 o'clock, or there's a whole lot you can look at in our bulletin, different ones that are listed.
- Also, if you happen to be one of our certified lay ministers, we are going to have a gathering this afternoon at 2 o'clock, just to get together for about an hour and a half and catch up with each other. We're going to talk about codependency. There's an interesting subject, huh?
- So let's take a moment, shall we, and focus on the Lord in prayer. Dear God, we do thank you for this time together, and we pray your blessings on us, that you'll take all the distractions and all the things that keep us from worshiping you, and help us just to open our hearts to what you'd have happen today.
- Bless us in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Good morning, guys. Have a seat, okay? Everybody sit down. Any other kids want to come up? Come on up. Welcome to join us.
- Does anybody know what this is? It's a duck. That's right. You know what this is?
- [ 2 : 08 ] A lamb. That's a lamb, isn't it? And this is? A horse. A horse. That's right. You know what this guy is? A rooster.
- He's a rooster. And this is a dog. Right? No, it's a dog. No, it's a pig.
- But what if I think it's a dog? Can it be a dog? No, it's still a pig. Even if I say it's a dog, it's a pig? Yeah, it's a pig. That's right.
- You know, sometimes people are going to tell you things that aren't right. Did you know that? Sometimes because they just make mistakes, or sometimes because they're trying to fool with you or something. But if you know a pig's a pig, it's a pig, right?
- And if a duck's a duck, it's a duck, isn't it? That's right. God wants us to know what's right and wrong and what's good and bad and what's good for us. That's why he gives us parents and teachers and Sunday school and things like that to help us know what we should do, right?

[ 3 : 10 ] So if we listen to God and we listen to the people who try to help us, we're going to find out what all the good and safe things are. Alright? So what are you thankful for? If you're thankful for something, raise your hand and you can share it.

My mom and dad and my guinea pig. My chickens, I got a new house, so I got chickens, my dogs, and two dogs, so I just wanted my chickens in the new house.

Cool. So I got new toys. Chickens in the new house if you can't hear it. That's what it is, yeah. My mom and dad. My dad.

I'm thankful to Sarah and dad. For my cats. My cousins.

My mom. My family. My family. I like cats. My sister and my cats.

[ 4 : 19 ] My dad. My mom and dad. Alright. One more. My mom. My mom. My mom. My mom and dad. Alright. One more. My mom.

Alright. Alright. Alright. Alright. Lord, we are thankful for all the good things in our lives, for our parents, our friends, our chickens, and even our preschool. Bless us, Lord.

Bless us always. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Okay. Now, those of you who are older than preschool can go out to church school. You preschool guys, stay right here with me, okay? Okay. If you're older than preschool, you can go out.

But if you're in preschool, stay here, okay? Stay right here with me if you're in preschool. father is your diversified and breath in preschool. When he says falls until pick up and Luca in a school. Djaent through I just went off and in a school, but he never heard the leap of my attention in French.

Peter'sdependent. Dude. How are you? Are you ready for your health? Female Lim Gri Drugsans. So he's doing what a raise time is as our preschool chansac, where we're adjusting to play more dzie In the pad. Tyler. Good morning. My name is Mrs. Jurde, they call me in Genesis Preschool, and I was asked this morning to read the thankful moment from one of our parents that had been coming to this preschool for about 15 years.

[ 5 : 53 ] When asked by Mrs. Minor to share a few thoughts about Genesis Preschool, my mind immediately began to reflect the past 13 years.

Shortly after moving to Lockport, my son was old enough to start preschool. I had been referred to Genesis and never even considered going anyplace else.

Over the years, the teachers have changed, but each of them was perfectly suited for their position. We started with Mrs. Mehar, then Mrs. Craft, followed by Mrs. Minor.

Six of my seven children have attended the four-year-old program. I feel that this program is perfect for preparing the children academically, socially, and emotionally for kindergarten, all while sharing life principles outlined in the Bible.

The love of Jesus and his teachings are felt inside the classroom, giving our children the most important foundation. I am so thankful that my family has been able to be a part of this program and appreciate the fact that lasting friendships are made here.

[ 7 : 09 ] I truly feel a part of the PCUMC family. Sincerely, Sandy Dickey and the Dickey family. Thank you. Thank you so much.

It is such a blessing to have all of the ministries that we have here at Pendleton Center United Methodist Church. As we continue in our worship, let's bring our gifts, tithes, and offerings, devoting them to the Lord.

Dear Heavenly Father, we do give you thanks and praise for all of the blessings that you pour out into our lives, for the blessing of the children, for the blessing of this day, and that we can gather together and worship you, Lord, that you are with us in our presence.

We just ask in Jesus' name that you bless this offering. Give us wisdom to know how to best use it for the furtherance of your kingdom, and help us to draw many to salvation in Jesus Christ.

It is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. You please be seated in the midst of all your blessings. Those children are a blessing, and they're teachers too, and we need to pray for them and keep all of them in our prayers.

[ 8 : 26 ] As a joy, and as we are concerned for their bringing up, and that they will be having the energy and all that they need to do the work that they do in our midst.

And we have some concerns as well, along with our joys this morning. Sue Phillips took a fall while skiing and has broken her ankle, and she's at home recovering. And Jan Fay, I think we had announced last week that she had broken her leg.

She is in rehab now. She was at the VA for a while, and now she's getting the rehab that she needs. It's going to be a little bit of a long haul for her because of the way that the bone was broken.

So we need to keep her in our prayers. And Bob Bush had back surgery. He is also in rehab. With these concerns and the concerns that are on your hearts as well, shall we turn to the Lord in prayer?

Heavenly Father, you are God. You are the creator of all things, who knows us better than we know ourselves, who knows all we need before we even ask.

[ 9 : 37 ] But you do call us to come to you in prayer, and we come to you with grateful hearts, knowing that you hear us, knowing that you answer us.

Lord God, we lift up the needs of those people who are sick and infirm this day. Those who are in need of healing, make them whole from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet, Lord God.

Not all people who are hurting, Lord, are hurting in their physical bodies, but many have broken hearts, Lord God, have broken spirits.

We pray in Jesus' name for those folks, too, for all who are in need of healing of any kind. Touch them, Lord. Draw them near to yourself. Reveal yourself to them.

They might come into your presence and get to know you better. Father, I pray in Jesus' name. Just lift up all of those folks who are grieving losses of all kinds.

[ 10 : 43 ] Pray in Jesus' name that you will send comfort. And peace, Lord, in all circumstances. There are so many circumstances in our hearts and in our lives that have not been mentioned out loud.

We take a moment and lift them up to you, Lord, now, knowing that you hear us. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

And loving God, this is indeed a time of turmoil throughout our world. People have had their lives torn apart by natural disasters, by persecutions, by violence that has been perpetrated on people.

Father, we pray in Jesus' name that all those who are under oppression will be delivered, that all those who are in need of having their lives restored and brought back to a place of stability, we just pray in Jesus' name that you will be present while they're going through those processes of becoming whole again.

And Father, we pray in Jesus' name for all those who cause violence, for all those who do persecute. We pray that they will come to know you.

[ 12 : 13 ] We pray that their hearts will be changed. We pray, Lord God, that in whatever way you call us, that each and every one of us who is part of your church will be able to go forth and share your love, to be witnesses, examples of Jesus Christ, for all of those who are in need of hearing the good news.

Father, we pray that you would prepare us for this. Through this worship service, make us ready to know what we need to do in the coming week. Let us be blessed in hearing your word.

Let it wash over us and cleanse us and transform us. And be with Pastor Tom and anoint him to deliver the message you've given him this morning. Let it be a blessing to him and to us.

Let all of our worship be a blessing to you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Good morning. Good morning. Today's reading is from Romans chapter 14, verses 1 through 4 and 13 through 19.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

[ 13 : 39 ] The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not. And the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another.

Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.

But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother to whom Christ died.

Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

[ 14 : 43 ] Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. This is the word of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord. Thanks, Adrian.

You know, the church is full from time to time, but I don't usually have people sitting on the floor up front here like that. That's pretty fun, you know. We've been looking at the book of Romans over the last few weeks, if you haven't been with us.

And the book of Romans is where Paul teaches us about his theology, his beliefs. And then he teaches us how to practice our life as Christians. So as we come to this chapter 14, he's going to teach us a little something about how we should live with one another.

Last week I was in Florida, and we have a place in Plant City we go to. And I don't know if you know anything about Plant City, but it's the capital of strawberries for the United States, and they have a strawberry festival there.

And they were serving deep fried chocolate covered bacon. Just let that soak in your arteries and everything else. That sort of puts it all together, doesn't it?

[ 15 : 47 ] Everything we're not supposed to eat in one bite. My wife is allergic to wheat. My brother's allergic to seafood.

My daughter's a vegetarian. My grandson's a junketarian. And my brother-in-law is Muslim, so he doesn't eat anything that comes from a pig.

In fact, he's so much against pigs that when his little boy got one of those Fisher-Price play sets, within about a minute, the pig disappeared from the set. Nobody knows where it went. Yeah, we know where it went.

So when we got together as a family trying to eat, it's like, what are we going to eat? What are we going to do? What are we supposed to eat? Do you think that Paul wrote this because he was concerned about what we eat?

I think he had something deeper in mind. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another whose faith is weak eats only vegetables. What Paul was talking about is, in the ancient days, the best meat came from the animals brought into temples to be sacrificed.

[ 16 : 53 ] Because when you brought an animal to be sacrificed, it was the best cut, the best lamb, the best cow, the best whatever you had to be brought before God. So if you wanted good meat, it came from a temple.

Now, if you lived in Jerusalem and you were Jewish, that wasn't a problem. But if you lived in the rest of the world, most of the temples were to some kind of pagan god. And there were people that thought that was just immoral to eat meat that at some point may have been possibly sacrificed to some false god.

So they only ate vegetables. Others said, it's a hamburger. Who cares where it came from? You follow? And there was a disagreement as to which was right and which was wrong.

Here's something that some people sometimes don't realize. Good people, Christian people can disagree. They can look at something and come out with completely different opinions.

And this has happened throughout history. And so we have different churches that do different things. When we talk about baptism, for instance, in some churches they say you have to be an adult, and others say you can be a child.

[ 18 : 01 ] Some say you have to dunk people fully underwater. Some say sprinkle. In our church we just say, whatever you want, we'll do it. We baptize babies. I've baptized 90-year-olds. I've put them all the way underwater.

We sprinkled water on their head. I've dedicated babies. I don't get caught up in this because, to me, I don't think this is the key issue. But for some people it is. They argue and they fight over it, along with a lot of other things.

In the early church, there were a couple different groups of people who had different opinions on how the faith should be expressed. One was led by Paul, who wrote this book.

He led the Gentile church, where they were reaching out to a bunch of people who had never been Jewish, trying to teach them about God in the Christian faith. The other group was led by James, who was the brother of Jesus.

And James led the church in Jerusalem, which was made up of a lot of Jewish Christians, who believed that even though you needed to believe in Jesus Christ, you also had to follow all the rules, the kosher rules, the eating rules, the sacrifices, and you had to be circumcised.

[ 19 : 08 ] Now, if you don't know what circumcision is, I'm not telling you. You've got to go look that up on the Google thing, okay? I'm not explaining that here. But let me explain it this way. If you're a man over the age of six days, you don't want this to happen.

And so this became a problem. So they took it to Jerusalem, where they brought all the leaders of the church to make a decision about this. At the time, Peter was basically the lead apostle of all these people.

And so he's got the followers of James on one side and the followers of Paul on the other side. And Peter is expected to sit in the judgment seat and make a ruling. I rule in favor of.

But see, the problem is, sometimes it's not as clear as we think it is. We get stuck between the opinions of people we love, people we care about, people we respect, and they disagree, and they want us to decide.

You ever have that happen before? I've got two friends of mine. By the way, both of them United Methodist pastors. One is an absolute, committed, totally sold-out Democrat.

[ 20 : 21 ] There is nothing the Democratic Party does wrong, and there is nothing the Republican Party does right. The other is an absolutely, totally committed Republican. There is nothing the Republican Party does wrong, and there is nothing the Democratic Party does right.

When these two get together, I have seen their wives leave the room in tears. I've heard fights and arguments and all sorts of things, and oftentimes they turn to me, well, what do you think?

I've got to tell you something about your pastor. I don't like commercials, you know? And when I'm driving in the car, sometimes I catch up on kind of current events and what's happening, and I've got the different radio stations on there for the news.

So I might be on CNN, but if the commercial comes on, I put on Fox. And if Fox has commercials, I put on MSNBC. And if all three of them have commercials, I'm all the way over at Bloomberg and BBC radio.

You see, what I've discovered is, is if you listen to all these people, they can look at the exact same thing and come out with worlds apart. Worlds apart. And so you can have good people who come out on completely different places.

[ 21 : 38 ] Sometimes that's what you're dealing with, like Paul and James. The other problem is, is good people, Christian people, can just be plain wrong. I know that might not sound that it's possible if God is leading us, but God leading us doesn't mean it doesn't get filtered through human minds, you follow?

Well, and sometimes we twist that the wrong way. Peter himself knew this. Peter was one time in the house of Simon the Tanner, and he's up kind of taking one of those half naps, you know what I mean, where you're half in, you're half out, and he saw a vision from heaven.

And he said a sheet came down with a bunch of animals on it. And a voice from heaven said, Peter, take and eat. But some of the animals were kosher, which means the Jews were allowed to eat them, and some of them were not.

They were what they called unclean and not supposed to be eaten. And Peter said, I will never eat something unclean. And the voice from heaven said, don't call what I have made clean, unclean.

Just because we can't see it doesn't mean God can't do it. Just because we don't get it doesn't mean God is somehow unable to proceed.

[ 22 : 54 ] And sometimes we're just plain wrong. Paul writes, who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master's servant stand or fall. And they will stand for the Lord will make them able to stand.

And sometimes good-meaning Christian people have come out on the wrong end of things. 150 years ago, the Methodist Church, like most churches in America, still supported slavery.

And 50 years later, we were still establishing churches so that those other people would have a place to go because we didn't feel they belonged in our congregations.

50 years ago, a woman was not allowed to preach in a pulpit. In fact, a woman was not allowed to be in any kind of leadership role in that day and age.

We were simply wrong. You know, there was a time the church actually believed that the sun revolved around the earth and they were ready to execute Galileo for being so foolish as to suggest it was the other way around.

[ 23 : 56 ] Now, sometimes good Christian people can be wrong. Is anybody in this room who's never messed up, never been wrong? Because if so, you know, it's yours, right?

You can have it. I only know one guy who did that and they put him on a cross and crucified him. The rest of us, including me, we mess up from time to time.

In fact, quite often. I said something a couple of weeks ago and I was saying how I messed up to our organist and she said, you offend somebody every week. I don't know why you're concerned about that one. If we open our mouths, we take a great risk.

It's the way it works. And I open my mouth a lot. What do we do when that happens? Have you ever done something you absolutely know is wrong, it came out of your mouth and you're sitting there going, oh my gosh, how do I get it back?

And then you're going, oh God, please let them forget that. Let them not understand it the way I heard it in my head. Please forgive me, God. Have you noticed we go to God right away and we want God to forgive us, right?

[ 25 : 02 ] We're real quick to say, God, forgive us. And get that guy over there I don't like, right? Smite my enemies. Take them down. Wipe them out. Anybody who disagrees with us.

And yet the prayer we say says, forgive us our trespasses. Forgive us our sins. Ask we forgive those who sinned against us.

Why do we do it? I'll tell you why we do it. It's because somehow in our brokenness, we feel if we can find somebody else, we can make look or act or in our mind be more broken than us, we feel okay about ourselves because we really believe God judges on a curb.

He doesn't, by the way. And so even the people we love, even the people we're closest to, it's so easy to find out how they do everything wrong.

That's not how you fold the towels. It doesn't matter how you fold a towel. It does matter how you fold a towel. If you want it to fit in the closet, you have to roll it. Oh my God, could you chew any louder?

[ 26 : 22 ] This goes on here. It takes two seconds. Well, then the next person that comes in will do it. That's not the point. Hey, did you throw away my leftovers? No. I could have sw- Oh, you.

What did you throw me? Nothing. The toilet paper goes over. It's printed that way so you can see it. No, the toilet paper goes under so that the cats don't get out of it.

That makes no sense. What do you want to get for dinner? I don't really care. Then just pick something. You choose. Told you.

Shut up. I don't see why I have to put the utensils face down. Because when they're sticking up like that, if someone trips and falls, they're going to impale themselves and die.

That's literally the stupidest thing I've ever heard. I'm not playing this game where I list every single thing and you shoot it all down. I'm not doing this again. Well, then I don't know what to tell you. Oh my gosh, watch this.

[ 27 : 20 ] This is the best line. Did you watch this without me? You weren't home. Seriously, six more inches and it's in the sink.

Well, then put it in six more inches. I get it. I get it. Anything will be fine. Fine. It's food. Fine. All right. We're going to get pizza.

Anything but pizza. What do you want to eat? That is Bill Paxton. It is Bill Pullman. Bill Paxton was in Aliens. That is Bill Paxton. That is him. Game over, man.

That is that man right there. Why am I going to put him away? I'm wearing them tomorrow morning. I don't care if you're wearing them tomorrow morning. I don't want them just sitting by my side of the bed all night. Why do you do this? You squeeze from the bottom.

The next person doesn't have to squeeze then. It's toothpaste. It's not like it's hard to squeeze it from a new area on the tube. Why are we fighting about this? Why are we fighting about this? Why are we fighting about this?

[ 28 : 16 ] I'm sorry. I shouldn't have made you make the decision. With that being said, I think your original call of pizza is fine.

Just no pepperoni. This is what we do to the people we love. The people we choose to be our life partners.

How do you think it goes down with strangers? Paul says, Except the one whose faith is weak without quarreling over disputable matters. Why do we get worked up over little stuff?

Fighting over everything. What would love do? What would Jesus do? What would you do if you were the one who had to sit in the judgment seat and make a decision between two friends, which was going to determine the future of the entire Christian faith going forward?

Peter had to look at his two friends and decide what would be the loving thing. What would be the grace-filled thing to do? And he stood up and he said this.

[ 29 : 26 ] There it is. Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you, that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

No, we believe it is through grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we're saved just as they are. Or in other words, look, we're all saved by God's grace.

The only way any of us make it is by being forgiven. Nobody's good enough. You know you can't keep all the rules. You can't be perfect enough. Why are you looking at other people and judging them?

As John Wesley, who started this whole denomination hundreds of years ago, said, if my heart is like yours, let's just shake hands and call ourselves friends. What are the important things?

[ 30 : 34 ] It's so easy to condemn people. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt. The one who does not. And the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does. For God has accepted them.

If God says somebody's okay, who are we to make a decision that they're not? Jesus said we're so worried about taking the speck out of somebody else's eye when we've got this huge log in our own.

First, we've got to take care of our own log. We've got to turn the thing inside out. Start working on your life and forget about judging everybody else. Share some love.

You know, I do things wrong quite often. Sometimes it's an equation. I'm 80% right. They're 20% wrong.

I'm 10% right. They're 90% wrong. You didn't get that, did you? But what I've discovered is no matter what, I'm always a little wrong.

[ 31 : 34 ] Maybe it's just the way I react. Maybe it's something I did that caused it. Maybe I wasn't sensitive to how they were feeling at that moment. What I've found out is if you pause and take a step back and take your emotions down a notch, you'll find that you can find something you did wrong.

And then you can say to the other person, I'm sorry that I did this. You know how far it goes when you do that? People will start to listen to what you think, what you say, what you feel, because they realize it's not all about you.



The Bible has Jesus telling us to love our neighbor as we ourselves would want to be loved. You know, for most people, I just look at them and I say, is this really worth the fight?

They come to me with an argument about somebody else. Is it really worth disputing with these people over these little things and causing hurt and pain and struggles in our relationship just to prove that somehow we were right about something that never will matter again?

I went to my brother-in-law's house for breakfast one time. This was early on in their marriage. Now, he's from the Middle East. And they eat food differently. I figured that out over the course of time.

[ 32 : 49 ] So I had no idea what to expect for breakfast. I did come down and see pita bread everywhere. They love that pita bread stuff, right? I like it too. And they have this stuff called hummus.

You might know what that is because it's becoming more popular. Back then, nobody had ever heard of it. And I like hummus. Not for breakfast, but I like hummus, right? But then I looked on the table and there's this white gunk.

There's this purple goop. There's this golden clod. And over here is something that looks like it came out of the back end of a baby. And I'm telling you, man, I am not going near any of this.

In my mind, I'm thinking, I don't know what these people eat, but I'm not eating it. But I didn't say it. I said, Muhammad, what do we have for breakfast here? I said, well, this is grape jelly and this is sour cream and this is honey and some peanut butter over here.

You see? Engage your mind before you engage your mouth. Engage love before you engage anything. To find out if maybe we're on the wrong side of the equation.

[ 33 : 57 ] Could you give up some kind of food just because somebody else is bothered by it? Could you eat something that you don't like so that you don't offend?

I went to a friend's house one time for dinner. We showed up unexpectedly. And what we found on the plate was a half a piece of chicken and a half a potato. It was obvious what they had done.

And there was one bucket left cooking on the stove. Huge bucket. My salvation. What I'd be able to eat. And it was filled with broccoli. Now let me tell you something.

George H.W. or whatever he is, Bush, years ago as president, made one of the greatest proclamations. We don't have to eat broccoli. I don't like broccoli.

I don't eat broccoli. My wife saw me go over to the pot and just start loading the broccoli on my plate. I had a half a plate of broccoli. She's watching me eat this during dinner.

[ 34 : 52 ] Somebody cuts their meal in half for you. You eat the broccoli. Amen? Amen? Amen? Sometimes we let ourselves get worked up over things that don't matter.

Things that are really not that essential. Some are. Some are not. Verse 16 of this passage says to us, Do not let what you know is good to be spoken of as evil.

Some things are essential. John Wesley said in the essentials we have to have unity. In the non-essentials we need to have liberty. And in everything we need to have charity. There are a few things we need to stick to because they're the truth and we know they are.

And we need to stand for that. But sometimes we are arguing over things that are really not that important. We have fish fries here every Friday night.

Anybody know where those fish fry idea came from? They don't serve fish fries in most of the country. But you see in our part of the country there's a high level of Roman Catholics and Roman Catholic churches.

[ 35 : 58 ] And many years ago, some of you are too young to remember this, they were told that they were not allowed to eat fish on Friday. Or, yeah, they could eat fish. Eat meat on Friday, right?

See, I told you I'd do that stuff. And especially during the season of that. See, you even got it. You know it. Okay. All right. And then, all of a sudden, all of a sudden, about 10, 15 years ago, a Pope got up and said, Eh, it doesn't matter.

Go ahead and eat whatever you want to. It doesn't make any difference at all. I've got to tell you, there were Roman Catholics around the world going, No! And even more so, those of us who serve fish fries are going, No!

So we watched all our Roman Catholic customers going out and having a hamburger on Friday night in Lent. And even Lent. What is Lent? I have people ask me that. Especially at fish fries.

Lent is a season the Church created. The Church created it to give you one time of the year where you take a little closer look at your faith. Maybe give something up to demonstrate your commitment to God.

[ 37 : 02 ] By the way, I want to give you a secret about Lent. You might not know. There's 40 days in Lent. But if you count from Ash Wednesday to Easter, you'll find out there's too many days. Because Sundays don't count.

If you gave something up for Lent, go for it today. You can't be fasting on the Lord's Day. You have permission. That's not just from me. That's how the days work.

Count them. It's true. I got two people already mumbling. Can't believe you. You said that. You see, what this stuff is, is it's what's called religion.

Religion isn't a bad thing. Religion is the fence that we put around things so that people won't get close enough to get hurt. In the beginning of the Bible, when the devil was talking to Eve, he asked Eve, did God say not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

And Eve said, God said not to eat from it. Don't even touch it. But you see, God didn't say don't touch it. Eve made that up. Because she knew if she didn't touch it, she wouldn't eat it. You follow? It's putting a fence around.

[ 38 : 07 ] That's what religion does. Religion is designed to make the barrier a little farther out so we don't even get close to doing what's wrong. It's not a bad thing so long as we remember what it is.

It's not the faith itself. It's something to help us. Not to be something that we have to follow like the commands of God.

Eating, drinking stuff, what we put in our body. Jesus in Matthew said, it's not what goes into the mouth that causes a person to sin. It's what comes out of the mouth. Envy and nastiness and spite and mean-spiritedness.

That's what causes us to sin. But we make stuff up. And we do it because we're trying to protect people, especially those we love, especially the little ones. That's why we put a fence around the yard is to protect the little children so they don't go out.

Or the dogs from going in the street, right? But sometimes it's just stuff people make up. I walk by parents in the church sometimes and I'll hear them say, you better behave or I'm telling Pastor Tom, what do you think I'm going to do to your kids?

[ 39 : 17 ] Go ahead and tell them. It's not going to accomplish anything. And they do the same thing with God. You better do that or God's going to be mad.

You really think that God is sitting up on his throne and the only thing in the universe he has to worry about is whether you ate a chocolate-covered piece of bacon stuck in fat and deep fried.

Really? Really? You think that's what God's primary concern in the world is? And so we argue over it. We argue over it.

And we create pain over it. And it doesn't help. I went to California one time and I was visiting my aunt out there. You know, they don't have fences there.

They have walls. Ten feet tall. I said, what in the world do you have walls around your yard for? Because we don't want to see them. We don't have anything to do with them.

[ 40 : 16 ] They're talking about their neighbors. When I grew up, fences were chain-linked things about this high. They were for kids and dogs. You get it? Not stockade fences so you don't have to see your neighbor.

You look in my yard. Don't be doing that in your backyard. Then you don't have to worry about them looking. Hello? I didn't say that. I didn't say that. So we get all wrapped up.

And it doesn't matter which side you end up on. If you end up on James' side or if you end up on Paul's side, either way you're going to be having somebody criticize you. Jesus ran into this in the book of Matthew in chapter 11.

He says that John came and he didn't eat and he didn't drink. And they said the guy must be nuts. He must have a demon. Jesus came and he both ate and drank and they said he's a drunkard and a glutton. Now do you think they called Jesus a drunkard because he was getting into too much grape juice?

Really? Seriously? Seriously? Seriously? And so we worry about it. Oh my gosh. I've had people say if I stop by somewhere at a tavern and have a drink, the world will come to an end.

[ 41 : 19 ] You know, the only place where I've prayed with people more than in the church is in the taverns. Because sometimes there's some people that need Jesus and nobody will go there. They build up such a big wall that nobody can get near them.

And they need God too. That doesn't mean I'm bringing a six pack for the next fish fry, by the way. You know? We don't have to be obnoxious about this. We don't have to be insulting or hurt people.

Don't you get it? The whole idea is yes, Christians disagree. But we don't have to deal with it with anger and hurt and judgment, but with love. Why do we have so many different churches and denominations and everything under the sun?

Well, we have it because people can't really agree. And I understand that. Some are big issues. Peter and James had a serious concern. The people like James still exist in our world.

And they say this. I want a place where when I walk in, the people look like Christians. They walk like Christians. They talk like Christians. My kids will get Jesus in that place. And we don't have to worry about those people who don't have God being around them.

[ 42 : 27 ] A set-apart, called-apart community that's safe. I get that. I long for that. There's other people that say, yeah, but there's a whole lot of folks that when they walk into an environment like that, they feel like they don't belong.

They never could be there. They'll never measure up. And so they never find Jesus. Some churches are building the walls. Some are knocking them down.

We have to decide which we are. And I'm not saying one is right. If you knock them all down, everything goes nuts. It's not anything goes. And if you build them too high, nobody ever finds out about Jesus.

Some things are essential. Some things are not. The essentials are very simple. God will forgive you if you trust in Him and believe in Him. You don't have to be perfect.

You don't even have to be that good. Just trust God. He can take away your sins no matter who you are. And then love God with your heart, soul, you know the rest, mind, and strength.

[ 43 : 31 ] And love your neighbor. Oh, that's harder to do. Those are the essentials. In Colossians, Paul wrote it this way.

You know what I love about the fish fries?

It is the greatest ecumenical gathering in this part of western New York. When I walk around those fish fries, I see Lutherans and Presbyterians and Methodists and Baptists and Roman Catholics.

We even have a whole table reserved for the people from the chapel that come over to eat dinner with us. I have theological discussions about everything on fish fry night. And we have people who don't go to church, don't even believe in God, who just want to peek inside the doors of the church someplace where it's safe.

So they come to the fish fries. We even have people that have no concern for God at this gathering. What a table that God sets. The way of love.

[ 44 : 51 ] The goal is simple. Paul lays it out for us. Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind to not put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Don't build fences. Don't build walls. We please God by loving the people made in his image. Now you're going to have feelings. You're going to have thoughts.

You're going to have stuff come into your mind. That's natural. We all have it. And then we sit down at the computer, right? We start the email. Exclamation point.

Exclamation point. Exclamation point. Exclamation point. Capital. Capital. Capital. Capital. Then delete it. I am an absolute believer in deleting emails.

There's a lot of stuff that should never be read again. We don't need a record for perpetuating whatever it is. Forever. Forever. Of all the things that came into our brain.

[ 45 : 50 ] That should never come out of our mouth. Amen? Jesus said, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Love them. Don't want to destroy them. Love them.

Care for them. Love on them. You need to step back. Take some time. Count to nine. You've heard that, right? Count to nine.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. You can read it. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness.

And self-control. If you do that, notice how your blood pressure just went down? There's no laws against that. We all start living that way. We're going to have a lot better world.

A lot better world. After Easter, we're going to be done with Romans. We're going to look at, we're actually going to look at the seven deadly sins and how they break us apart in our lives, in our families, in our church, and how to build community.

[ 46 : 47 ] And we're going to go to Gilligan's Island. I don't know if you know that, but all those characters are based on the seven deadly sins. So we're going to visit Gilligan for a little bit. You see, we need to be concerned about what God is concerned about.

Paul puts it out simple. The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.

People won't care what you know until they know that you care. My brother-in-law, you might be surprised, he's a Muslim. He believes in an entirely different religion than we do.

My brother-in-law has come to church here more than once. In fact, a couple of summers ago, I did his daughter's wedding with a Methodist wedding ceremony.

And I brought Jesus to people who would never have heard Jesus because I could hear what he had to say, and so he was willing to listen to what I had to say.

[ 47 : 51 ] If their heart is like ours, let's love a little bit. Because the power of God's love, that's what will change the world. You know, I have a worship service on Saturday night, and I call it my rehearsal service.

I tell them they're very forgiving. In that video, you know where there was the beep? I had downloaded this. There was a beep in this thing. But when we showed it last night, there was no beep.

There was a word. And of course, everybody assumed I did that on purpose, you know? I just messed up, you know? I mess up a lot. Don't you really, honestly?

I mess up a lot. In fact, if you try to do something, I guarantee you you'll mess up a lot. We need people to love us anyways. We certainly need a God that will love us anyways.

So we turn our sins over to God, and we let God forgive them, and we move on. So let's do that, shall we? Dear God in heaven, I have sinned. By the things I say, by the things I do, and mostly the things I think.

[ 49 : 04 ] Forgive me, Lord. Help me to do the right things. Help me to do the loving things. Help me to tear down the walls.

Help bring people to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You know, Jesus didn't die for us because we were so good.

He didn't hang on a cross because we were wonderful people, and we deserved it. Jesus died for us while we were broken, sinful, and doing all sorts of wrong things. That's how much God loves you.

He loves you in spite of you. By the way, there's people around you that love you in spite of you, too. You should look at them, love them back. And so he said, if we believe in him and we trust in him, he'll forgive us and give us a brand new beginning.

And so in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen. Amen. The Lord in the song said, there are no strangers here.

[ 50 : 08 ] We are not strangers to one another if we are in the Lord. God welcomes everyone to his table. If you love God, earnestly repent of your sin, and seek to live in peace as a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are welcome at the table this morning.

The United Methodist Church doesn't say you have to be a member, or that you have to attend so many times. It can be your first time through the doors, and you are welcome to come to the table, to commune with your brothers and sisters in Christ, to meet with the Lord, as he has called us to do.

So come. The Lord be with you. And also be with you. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks to Christ. It is right, and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

You brought all things into being and called them good. From the dust of the earth, you formed us in your image, and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

[ 51 : 24 ] And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you, and blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ.

When you gave him to save us from our sin, your Spirit led him into the wilderness, where he fasted 40 days and 40 nights to prepare for his ministry.

When he suffered and died on a cross for our sin, you raised him to life, presented him alive to the apostles during 40 days, and exalted him at your right hand.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

[ 52 : 26 ] Now, when we, your people, prepare for the yearly feast of Easter, you lead us to repentance for sin and the cleansing of our hearts.

that during these 40 days of Lent, we may be gifted and graced to reaffirm the covenant you made with us through Christ. On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread and gave thanks to you.

He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Amen. Do this in remembrance of me.

And when the supper was over, he took the cup and he gave you thanks and praise and gave it to his disciples, and he said, Drink from this, all of you. This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new covenant, poured out for you, poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. And so, in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves, in praise and thanksgiving, as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith, Christ has died.

[ 53 : 58 ] Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here. And on these gifts of bread and wine, make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world, the body of Christ redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. Until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your Holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

Shall we pray with the confidence of children of God, the prayer Jesus taught us. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

[ 55 : 08 ] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen. For those of you who are gathered here with our preschool, your gathering will be in the gym, and we do invite you to head there for your activities. May the Lord bless you and be with you.

I know that there's difficulties and struggles and hurtful people in the world, and sometimes we have to confront them. I get that. Most of the people you're going to run across are not that way. Reach out with love, and you'll see a little bit more love coming your way.

May God go with you and bless you and keep you in his peace and joy that stand forever. Go in peace. Amen? you