

“Love Over Freedom”

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Series: *Romans*

Bible Text: Romans 14:13-15:7

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If you have a Bible, you can be making your way to the New Testament book, Letter of Romans. We are in chapter 14, verse 13, through chapter 15, verse 7. If you don't have a Bible, you can follow along in the Worship Guide. It's printed there for you. Last week in our series through this letter, we saw Paul lay out a framework for how to deal with issues of conscience in the Christian life. And apparently, from what I hear, I'd say the discussion in your small groups was vigorous, is the word that seems to fit. This weak and strong language, I don't think we like it. Nobody wants to be called weak in an area. Everybody wants to be strong. And the reality is that everybody's kind of strong and kind of weak, depending on what we're talking about.

I did want to make clear before we even read this, just to kind of get our bearings, there are places where weak and strong language in the Bible is used to talk about somebody who knows the Lord, who takes a stand on a clear moral issue. And in that moment, they are seen as strong and those who might capitulate are seen as weak. But remember, the way he's using that language here is, strong here means free in conscience and weak here means bound in conscience. The weak strong framework really doesn't apply to whether it's okay to murder someone or not. It's not, just so we're clear, not okay. There's no strong or weak on that. It's just wrong. These are about issues that are not so clear, issues of conscience, things that are not black and white, but maybe gray. And we have much freedom on all of those things. But as this passage is going to tell us, there's an even higher value that we're to carry that actually helps us deal with this stuff.

So let's, let's see the rest of the argument today. Let's read and remember that this is God's word and it's for us. Beginning in chapter 14 verse 13,

13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.
17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.
19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.
20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.
21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.
22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.
23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.
3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."
4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,
6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Help us now, our Father, as we look at your word. It's complicated and our brains go a thousand directions and what we need is clarity and wisdom and the illumination of your Holy Spirit. So take your word now and make it clear to us and apply it, we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

Our family made it as long as we could. I think the count is 10 years. We made it 10 years without watching the movie Frozen. We had a good run. The boys don't, they're not into princess movies. It just wasn't an issue. We didn't have to do it, but against my wishes with a daughter, it somehow came with the package, and now I know what so many of you know, which is every word of the song, let it go. And I also know what you know, which is that it's incredibly catchy and you find yourself humming it or singing it to yourself periodically, though. You remember the words that you're singing. It's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. Let it what? What did I just say? No right, no wrong, no rules for me. Is that what I want for my child? Is that what I know? What are we saying? Of course, it's the selfish song of the character who's chosen to, you know, enjoy her own selfishness rather than deal with the issue. It's a Disney movie, so by the end, obviously, it's perfectly resolved, of course. That type of song has become the song genre of our day. You could call it the freedom song. The song that declares, I'm finished with other people and what they think of me. It's time to care about me.

To quote another popular song performed by the same person that sang the Frozen song, I do know stuff besides country music, it turns out. She sings in another song, if I'm flying solo, at least I'm flying free. That touches a nerve with every single red-blooded American and non-American human. Even if I'm flying solo, at least I'm flying free. This is the primary value in our world right now, my personal freedom. Me doing whatever it is that I want and if I have to run over you in the process, sorry, so be it. This is me doing me, sorry if it affects you. We could say that the primary value of the world in which you and I live is liberty over love. Personal freedom over love. Love costs something. Love requires me to give up myself at times or to give up my time, my resources, my self-care, but freedom and liberty is me getting mine. You and I live in a world that says liberty always over love, of course that leads to isolation.

Here in Romans, we're reminded that we've been transferred into a very different, much better type of kingdom. And in Christ's kingdom, the value is love over liberty, which always leads to actual relationships and communities. So what we're going to do this morning is talk about what happens when liberty is over love? What happens when love is over liberty, and how do we get there? That's the outline. So let's talk about the natural way of things.

When liberty is greater than love.

Paul repeats in this passage much of what he said in last week's passage. Look at verse 14. This is his premise. He says, he knows and is persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Remember, we're talking about these issues of conscience and he's saying again, verse 20, everything is indeed clean. And what he's doing is he's saying exactly what Jesus said in the gospel accounts when he said it's not it's not what a person eats that makes him unclean.

It's not what's outside that comes in that makes you unclean. It's what comes out of your heart. That's what makes you unclean. Paul says that Jesus said it first.

Peter makes it clear in another place. Meat created by God. It's fine. It's good. Jewish background Christians, remember, might have had a problem with how the meat was prepared based on their the way that they were raised up. And so some of them chose to abstain from meat because they didn't know if it was prepared according to the kosher laws. But meat in and of itself is created by God. It's good. Wine. Wine is morally neutral as a substance. It is neither good nor bad. It just is. In other places it says that it's good. It cheers the heart. Same with a thousand other things.

Things aren't evil in and of themselves. But when the human heart gets a hold of things, we can co-opt them and turn them into something that is evil or is used for evil.

The body is good. God made it. Sex is good. God made it. It's how the world continues to operate. The human heart can take the body and abuse it, and it can take sex and it can put it in all of the wrong places outside of marriage and with the same sex, et cetera. And it can take it public for public consumption. You see the difference. The body is good. Sex is good. And then what we do with it turns it into absolute chaos and death.

Nothing is unclean or evil in itself.

Plants that grow made by God are good. And humans can take plants that grow and turn them into an opportunity to alter our minds and escape whatever it is we're trying to escape. And use it for evil. Even plants. Sex, bodies, wine, plants are all good in and of themselves.

To be clear, there is no good pornography. There is no good immorality. There's no good drunkenness. And there's no good getting high. Those are not good. Anyone can abuse anything and use them in the wrong ways.

And to take it further and worse. We can also use good things in a right way in such a way that we violate the conscience of someone who's in a different place than we are about it. You can eat meat to the glory of God. You can do that. You can have a glass of wine to the glory of God. You can also do both of those things in such a way that you coerce, influence, manipulate a brother or sister whose conscience is bound on those particular issues. And if they participate against their conscience before God, in that moment, you just embodied the values of the kingdom of the world. Freedom first, love if I have time. Liberty first, my enjoyment first, giving up my rights and loving another person if I have margin. Paul says when you do that, verse 13, what you've done is *you've put a stumbling block in the way of a brother*, a hindrance. You've literally put a rock in their running path and they will fall flat on their face. He says it in a stronger way in verse 15. Look at that.

If your brother's grieved by what you eat, you're no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

We could destroy a brother or sister. He or she could be grieved because you, let's use his example, eat meat in such a way, with such language that he's enticed. And has a crisis of conscience and feels pressure and possibly temptation. And then if you look at verse 23, what becomes clear is that he eats the meat, but it's not from faith, and for him it's sin. Which is a wild thing to say. The meat is fine. It's made by God. It's good.

There's no subjectivity when it comes to God's law. Murder is always wrong. We said that. But eating meat is objectively fine from God's perspective. But subjectively, in your life in relationship to God, your conscience before God has such a prominent place that you could partake in something that is not sinful. But for you, it is sin because your conscience was bound and you went against it.

It shows us what a pride of place God gives our conscience on some of these secondary sorts of matters. Conscience isn't over everything. God's law is over everything. But in these secondary matters, our conscience is given pride of place. So he says, if you enjoy your freedom in such a way that you cause your weaker brother or sister to go against their conscience, you just destroyed them. You just led them to sin. You just helped them drift further from Jesus.

So that's what the world looks like when we live as though freedom is the most important value and love is nice if I have time. This is our world. It's literally the phrase that we use all the time is eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. It's the value of the world around us. And that means that you had better get something for yourself right now. This world is all you get, but love is destroyed and community is blown up and we end up being alone. Or we will only spend time with people that absolutely agree with us on everything, which works for a time until they disagree with you on something because it's going to happen, because humans are difficult. And eventually, even the person that aligns with me on everything, I'm going to differ with them. And if freedom is the primary value, I will reject them for the sake of my freedom, one hundred percent of the time, or I will try to reverse disciple them.

You know what I mean when I say that? I will try to make them not like Jesus, but like me. I will do everything in my power to help them understand that no, no, no, no, this is the way. This is the path. Do as I do, be as I am. Reverse discipleship. We're not telling them be like Jesus. We're telling them be like me.

If you're the weak brother or sister on an issue and the strong brother or sister is trying to make you like them, you have an obligation to resist. You're required by God not to violate your conscience.

Martin Luther said it, the reformer, he said it's neither right nor safe to go against conscience. That's true. This doesn't mean that you don't listen to a good argument from somebody who thinks differently from you. It doesn't mean that you don't have a conversation. We talked about that last week. There's a place for real conversation and trying to persuade and even talking about the issue itself. And we change. You don't stay weak on something forever. You might become strong on it. You might be strong now on an issue and you become weak on it later. But sometimes it's real conversations that help us.

To you who are stronger, I say to you, don't slip from conversation and argument to coercion, guilt and manipulation or laying a stumbling block because you just want them to be like you. You're not the Holy Spirit and neither am I. We make our arguments and then we choose to love the person. And it's God who frees the conscience, not us. But if I press someone to a choice that goes against their conviction, I'm trying to play the role of God. And I've just been co-opted by the enemy in that moment. I've just been used as a tool of the other side.

Where might you be tempted in your life to say, look, on this issue, all I want to know is who's coming with me? Where might you be tempted to say that?

Where might you be guilty of pursuing liberty above love?

Where might you be trying to make people into many disciples of yourself?

Where might you even bow up? And in a brutal moment of honesty, you were to say, I'm going to do what I do and I honestly don't care about what anybody else thinks about it, says about it or how it affects them. Where do you do that in a moment of real honesty?

That's evidence of a heart that has decided the kingdom of the world is enough. That's fine. I'll take it. Who cares about the words that I say? Who cares about the things that I choose to enjoy? It's my right. And do not ask me to give up my rights.

You know, you know what Americans love? They love their rights. I love my rights. We even have a bill of them, right? You've probably heard it said and maybe said yourself, look, I'm going to do what I do, and if somebody doesn't like it, they're free to go and live somewhere else, right? They can move. We will literally choose to live by ourselves, completely alone, rather than to have our sense of liberty violated.

You've heard the joke probably of the guy who lived a long time on a desert island by himself and he's rescued and he's showing his rescuer around. Here's my hut. Yeah, look at it. You know, here's all my stuff that I acquired, things that I built and down the line. Yeah, there's that building over there. That's my church. That's where I worship. And then the guy says, but what's that other building over there? Oh, that's my old church. I hate those people, right? Like that's that is liberty at all costs right there. I will live by myself.

That violates the primary law of God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. All right, so we need to look at that.

What happens when we choose freedom over love? What would it look like then?

What does the world look like if it's love over liberty?

Let's talk about that second point. Look at verse 16. *Paul tells them, do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.* And he's speaking to the strong person here. And it's let's again, let's take his easy example. It's meat. Jewish background Christians are freaking out because the Gentiles are eating this meat that they don't know how it was prepared. And the Jewish background Christians are saying, we'll just abstain and be vegetarians. If the Jewish background Christian is tempted to eat the steak because it looks so good. And then you, the stronger brother, start eating it really slowly and you start describing it. Look at the marbling. Look at how it was cooked to perfection. It's a 24 ounce porterhouse and it is flawless. And your weaker brother is so hungry and you taunt and coerce. And then you just hand him the fork and the plate and he takes a bite of it. He just violated his conscience before God. He didn't do that because he felt free. He did it because he was hungry and you made it easy for him.

Here's what's going to happen. If his conscience is still sensitive to the Lord, he's going to double down, and he's going to be mad at himself and he's going to continue to think that no, meat is evil. He's going to call something good meat, evil. That's best case scenario. Worst case scenario is you just helped him sear, pardon the pun, we're talking about steak, sear his conscience. And now he's just hardened and now he's further away from God than when he began. And Paul's point is saying that is not what the kingdom of God is about.

It's not about eating and drinking. It's about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Verse 17.

When we care about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit more than our liberties, what we're doing is we're serving Christ and we're serving his people. And that is that is the kind of thing that is pleasing to God.

It's acting in ways that are consistent with the values of his kingdom. And here's what it means. Liberty is great. And sometimes it can and should be given up in the service of love.

Liberty is great. It is a joy to enjoy the things that God has given you and calls blessed and good. And there are times when your liberty can and should be given up out of love for a brother or sister.

Love first, then enjoy liberty.

And again, this is thinking about behavior that would entice. Sometimes people take this passage too far and they say you, let's do the obvious example here, you having a glass of wine at dinner, right, just not affecting anybody else. You might hear somebody say, look, you're doing that in public and you're violating the conscience of somebody else. I'm not so sure that that's what Paul is talking about here. You're not actively trying to persuade and entice.

I've heard this passage used to say, see, avoid all appearance of evil, to which I would reply. But drinking a glass of wine isn't evil. And you could say that with all the other different things. Unless you do it in such a way that your weaker brother or sister violates his conscience, then you have done evil.

Reading a book, watching a show with a clear conscience is a blessing, it says in verse 22. Blessed is the one who doesn't accuse himself for the things that he approves of. Until you are begging a conscience bound brother or sister to sin against God so that you can share in it with them.

If nothing else, I hope that you see that these kinds of issues demand an incredible amount of wisdom. Because what would be easiest to sit up here and make a big chart and show you on this issue, you know, here's how to. This is not violating a conscience. This is. And it just gets into the weeds and life is complex and people are difficult. You're just going to have to have wisdom.

It takes wisdom to know when my freedom would tempt another person.

But what will help us to become wise is to know the goal. Look at verse 19. *Mutual upbuilding*. We're trying to do something that builds up a brother or sister, not tears him down.

Chapter 15:1, *we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves.*

In the original. It actually isn't bear with its bear up, meaning it's our job to try and hold them up, not tear them down. But this requires us to understand that love and our brothers and sisters is more important, more compelling, more satisfying, even than our liberties. It means that I have to value the thing that Jesus values most, which is the love of a brother rather than my own exercise of freedom.

If you love a person, you might be glad to give up your freedom for a moment because you care about their good. Doesn't mean that we don't talk about these things. Doesn't mean we don't try to persuade. But love gladly lays aside a freedom for the sake of the relationship.

We do this in other areas of our lives. This is what happens when a boy meets a girl and this boy starts doing things that are uncharacteristic. The boy starts to listen to that song that he did not previously listen to or he goes to the theater or the ballet. And you're like, what is what has happened to you? What is wrong with you? Oh, he met a girl.

This is why I ever went on a walk. I've never woken up a single day in my life and thought, you know what I want to do today? I want to go for a walk in nature. I've never thought that in my life. And I met a girl and suddenly I started going on a lot of walks through nature. She was a horticulture major, so she was identifying plants and I was just wrapped attention on those plants.

We do it with kids. Why would a fully grown man get on the floor for a tea party? We give up our rights and our freedoms when we actually love another human being. Our tendency is to demand our rights and love when convenient. The values of the kingdom say no, no, no, no.

Operate with deference and love first.

Living in the kingdom of God means you exercise patience rather than teaching them a lesson.

When the strong lovingly lay aside their freedom for the sake of the weak, it's an actual beautiful thing. And relationships flourish, and discussions about issues of conscience become more fruitful. They become better. They become richer and deeper because nobody's using this as a flamethrower. Nobody's trying to win and destroy. There's a chance for people actually being included rather than excluded because they don't fit. The weak person has a chance to be built up and not torn down.

And guess what? The strong person has a chance to learn the school of Christ, where the strong willfully lay aside their strength and become weak for a moment for the sake of somebody else. Jesus would say that in that moment; you're learning true greatness. You're learning how to serve someone rather than just take care of yourself.

Think of an issue where you're strong and somebody else might be weak, and consider what would it look like to love the weaker brother or sister in your own circles, in your own community groups, in your own orbit with Christians. What's the freedom that you have and your right to enjoy it, but if you love this person or that person, you might need to consider laying it aside for a moment?

This can happen in your marriage. Husbands and wives don't always agree on issues of conscience. And a loving thing to do with a spouse is to lay down your rights because you actually love the other person. Doesn't mean you can't talk about it, but lead with love first. This is called dying to self, or the way Jesus put it it's called taking up your cross and following him, losing your life for his sake so that you might find it.

Where do you need to do that in your extended family, in the church community?

If you're the weak person on an issue, and again, we're all weak on something, but I want to admonish you on something. Notice when someone loves you and gives up a right and take it as love because you're still going to be tempted, like we saw last week, you're still going to be tempted to judge the strong person. You're still going to be tempted to assume that they're wrong. But God's word is our standard, not the opinions of men. Look at the word and discern the difference between a truly moral, clear issue and an issue of conscience. And resist the urge to judge the strong person. Don't think to yourself, yeah, that's right. You should have given that up, you sinner, right? Like, resist that urge. That's just so natural out of us.

The weak and the strong both need to do some heart diagnosis.

If you're free and strong, do you love your freedom more than your brothers and sisters?

If you're bound and weak, do you believe the best about your brothers and sisters when it comes to an issue where you disagree with them?

If we're honest, this all just feels rather impossible. I might muster up the energy to do it once this week or year, but I don't know that I can make a lifestyle out of this. I don't want to give up my freedom all the time.

How do we ever become people who can make some progress on this?

How do we ever begin to actually live in the kingdom that says love first, liberty second?

Let's talk about how to get there.

Paul's last point, Paul gives us both the pattern and the motivation patterns in chapter 15, verse three. *Christ did not please himself*. There it is. The Lord Jesus did not come to please himself. All the reproaches that men throw against God, he came and they were thrown on him and they killed him. And he never reproached God. He never violated a conscience. He never did anything wrong. And they killed him anyway. He is the pattern.

He could have called down angels to his defense, but he didn't come to please himself.

He who dwelt in glory, laid glory aside and emptied himself by taking on our humanity.

He who was rich became poor for your sake to serve sinners.

That is to say, he laid aside his rights and his freedoms and became weak and suffering death out of love for the father and love for you, if you're his.

If you want to know what it looks like to lay aside your freedom for the sake of love, you're going to need to look very closely at the Lord Jesus himself.

Patient with the weak, gracious and gentle with people who were confused, strong and pointed against those who knew they were right. He would blow up somebody who thought they had the gospel and was wrong about it. Sometimes love has a sharp edge to it, but gracious and patient with weak, struggling sinners like us. He's the pattern of self-giving, self-denying love.

But you know this and I'll say it again, though, you and I need more than a pattern because we could talk about here's the example, go follow it. And it's like, OK, well, great. Go be like Jesus.

Be perfect. Right. Tell me how it goes. It doesn't work that way. Just because we have a good pattern doesn't mean we have the ability to do it. We've spent the whole time talking about how everything within us wants to say, no, my rights, not your freedom, not your love. How do we do it?

Jesus is not just our example. He is the one who came to save us and to change us. We have not loved our brothers and sisters, and we have flaunted our freedom and we've sinned against God and man. And we deserve God's judgment and we need God's mercy. And Jesus in 14 verse 15 came to die for people like us, it says, and it's because of his death and his resurrection. Chapter 15, verse seven, here's the summary of the whole argument that we have been welcomed by God.

The only way we can ever welcome one another is if Christ has welcomed us.

See, what happens is if the welcome of Jesus gets into your heart, it actually begins to change your motivations. When you realize that you were a rebel and God came and got you and Jesus bore the penalty for sin on the cross, it was horrible. And he was raised from the dead in triumph. And God went and got you who were running away from him. And he snatched you from that path and turned you around and put you in union with Jesus by faith. When that makes its way into your heart, suddenly, you know what it feels like to be welcomed. And you may actually want to turn around and welcome somebody else.

That's the dynamic of the Christian life. If we could do that, we might find ourselves living out verses five and six from chapter 15, *living in harmony with one another, glorifying with one voice the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. All that to say, the only way this kind of love is possible is through the gospel.

And if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, have no idea where some of you are spiritually. I would want to say this to you. It is impossible for you to love another person and give up your freedom and your rights for them. You can't do it. You won't do it. Moreover, you will also continue to run over people to get what you want. And I'm saying that because I know exactly this is what humans do. It's not unique to you. And it's not as though every Christian in here isn't like that. No, no, no, no. That's what we are like. It's what we do. And it's why our relationships don't work. And it's why our job isn't satisfying. And it's why we want to vegetate and check out on the weekends. And it's why we're alienated from the God who made us and standing under his just wrath.

And the call to all of us, repent, ask Jesus to forgive you, and he will. Look to him to welcome you into the presence of the father because of his death and resurrection, and trust him to make you somebody who stops demanding and starts giving up out of love.

If you're a Christian, and you genuinely find it difficult to love your brothers and sisters, especially those who differ so strongly, you're going to have to go deeper in the welcome of Christ in your own heart.

The cure for all of us is the same. It is the gospel. Ask him to press in exactly how he has welcomed you. Look to the word at how Jesus didn't please himself, but gave himself up for us. Ask him to make you more like he is and to give you what you need to live out the values of his kingdom.

It was welcoming love, as I reflect on it, that was instrumental in my own life. Not so much to do with Christian liberty, but just welcoming love. I went to college assuming that it would be just like high school and I needed to perform. It was 2001, so I needed to be cool. Whatever that meant and whatever we meant by that, I needed to be excellent. I needed to strive to get what I needed and I needed to take care of myself. And I needed to be free. And it was the mercy of God in my first two weeks of college to break me and isolate me and put me in a place where I did not know a single soul on that campus, not one, not even an acquaintance. And it was miserable. And my first real prayer was. Help. Send people. And I went to a free pizza thing at a campus ministry because it was free and I was bored in my dorm. And I met there what would become what I didn't know then, it was a small group of Christians. They all went to the same high school. They knew Jesus. They saw through all of my stupidity and falseness. And there was a lot of that. And over that semester, they did not have to spend time with me. They didn't have to be patient with me. They were free and they could have chosen to do their own thing and have their own group and be perfectly content. But they didn't seek their own good. They sought mine and they grafted me in. And God showed me his welcome in the gospel through the welcome of that small group of people who willfully gave up their freedom. Out of love for a really strange guy from Rabin County.

And that's how the kingdom works. It's not liberty over love. It's love over liberty. It's not liberty that leads to isolation and death. It's love that leads to taking a scraggly outsider and bringing them in and choosing to include. And you can only have it because of King Jesus himself, who loved us to his own hurt, who never pleased himself.

Trust him and look to him and go find weak and strong brothers and sisters and welcome them. Let's pray together.

Father, you know us and you know we can't love people without the presence and power of your spirit. We can't give anybody something that we haven't tasted for ourselves. I pray for everybody in this room, myself included, that we would know the welcome of the eternal and almighty God because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus received by faith. Help us know how you have welcomed us, how you have loved us, how our Lord Jesus gave up everything for us. And would you make us like him? Help us to be patient with each other. When we discuss and get into conversations about issues of conscience, let them be fruitful. Let us not weaponize those things. Knit us together, O Lord, and help us to become the kind of community that reflects the values of your kingdom. We ask that, Jesus, in your name. Amen.

**Portion of scripture read before sermon—Psalm 69:1-9