

Sermon for September 13, 2020 by Pastor Hanberry “What Would a Judgement-Free World Look Like?” based on Romans 14:1-12 & Matthew 18:21-35 Trinity UCC, Manchester, MD

I am writing this from the recliner on our couch with a brace on my right knee. The brace and I will be together for at least six weeks, that is six weeks after knee surgery this coming Thursday morning, September 10, 2020. On the last day of a wonderful vacation at the beach in Cape May, NJ, with our youngest daughter, Sarah, her husband, Neel and their two lovely children, Ehan and Millica. I made a wrong decision in carrying stuff out to my truck for packing for the trip home: I carried two boxes down a flight of stairs and thinking I was at the bottom took the last step with my left foot and unfortunately there were two more steps and I fell and my right leg buckled under me and tore all of the quadricep tendons in my knee.

I am not writing this little story of my painful experience just for the fun of it. No, rather, I am admitting to making a wrong decision about trying to do more than I am physically capable these days. I remember hearing myself say to myself, “Gerry, go slow; take one piece at a time...there’s plenty of time.” Did I Listen to myself? Of course not.

And now I am suffering the consequences of my not listening or paying attention to the appropriate way of doing things when packing a car. I am not suffering the pain of a very sore and hurt knee. I am now paying the price for my impatience or whatever else contributed to my choices.

As an aside, I am also paying the price of not having enough time or enough pain-free moments to give full attention to this sermon. Instead of getting no sermon out to those of you who do not receive worship packets by e-mail, I needed to offer something related to our scriptural texts for this Sunday. So here it is.

What shall I say about what a judgement-free world would look like? It would not look like my life right now. I am still beating myself up about my decision (and it really was a personal decision – a choice really) to try and carry too much in my arms down the stairs of our beach house. I don’t need anyone else to “fuss at me” or to hold me accountable for my actions, actions that resulted in a lot of personal, physical pain, and cost to others who are now taking care of me...in preparation for knee surgery this Thursday.

Pat, my wife, is what **judgement-free** looks like. She has not criticized me. She has only helped me in a thousand different ways already. Of course, she knows I don't need any help in being critical of myself or in judging me for not paying more attention.

What does Paul say in our text from Romans? ¹⁰ *Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?^[c] Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister?^[d] For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.^[e]* ¹¹ *For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to^[f] God."* ¹² *So then, each of us will be accountable to God.*

It's ironic or just plain strange that Paul would say something about "every knee shall bow..." Even if I tried, I couldn't bow a knee...not even to God right now....not physically anyway. I bow with my soul to God's love and care for me and for you. I bow to those who love me and care for me and support me in these days. Paul would ask me the question: "Gerry, why do you pass judgment on yourself?" It's hard not to do that when the pain is too great to deny.

I write this very brief testimony to my actions that I might hold myself accountable. That I might express my gratitude for those who love me enough to simply care for me and hold me close that I can heal and continue to do the work to which I am called in these days.

I pray the same for you all these days. Be gentle with yourselves. Be gentle with each other and sometimes just get out of the way of the other they might be gentle with themselves as well.

With a sense of gratitude that my injuries are fixable and repairable. And may I leave it at that for now so that I don't spend too much time thinking of how much worse it could have been for me and others. Amen.