

Sermon Summary
13th after Pentecost
11th September 2011

- In Romans 14:1-14, Paul addresses a dispute within the church at Rome, most likely (given his remarks about food and the calendar) on the lines of the degree to which Christians need to follow Jewish practice.
- He identifies two groups: the weak and the strong.
- He does not praise the strong and criticise the weak, as the names might first suggest, nor does he reverse the order (along the lines of “I am strong when I am weak”- see 1 Cor 1: 26-31)
- Instead, he praises both groups for doing what they do out of a desire to serve God.
- Paul advises the following protocols: not to be judgmental, to be respectful and to take care not to alienate people who live out their faith in ways different to ours.
- A similar message is found in the writings of Bishop Frank Weston, who , as a leading figure of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the early 20th century and a notoriously cranky opponent, might well have been expected to be dismissive of those who were “lower church”, but these were his words:
- “We must make up our mind, once and for all, to see eternal love present in our midst; and shut our eyes to ceremonies, or lack of ceremony, in the conduct of the worship. Let us endure what we dislike, even what we feel to be wrong in others; and just speak with love. As Christ gave love to Love, naked, in the pain and darkness of Calvary, so does he give it in the plainest service. So also does Christ give love to Love in all the pomp and glory of the most ornate worship, as once He carried love's offering through the ranks of adoring angels to heaven's high altar.
Our business is to give love to Love; not to hurt Love by a spirit of controversial unrest, not to mention bitterness and hate.” (*Conquering and to Conquer*, p.71)
- Mark Chapman gives this assessment of Weston's thought:
- “Catholicism was thus not a matter of party, but was a recognition of and trust in God's presence in Christ and in his church. This was not a trust that Weston found easy, but he was utterly convinced that unless there was a complete acceptance of the divinity of the human Christ and his abiding presence in the visible church united around its bishop, then Christianity would be a complete sham”¹
- Our situation is like that of the church at Rome which consisted most likely of a number of house churches which met together. It was likely that tensions arose between these groups. For us, problems do not arise so much within congregations as when those congregations gather at a diocesan level. We do well to remember Paul's protocols and Weston's focus on love rather than factionalism.

11th September 2011

¹ Mark D. Chapman, “Christ and the Gethsemane of Mind: Frank Weston Then and Now”, *Anglican Theological Review* 85/2 (2003), 281-307. Both quotes on pp. 285-6