

## **Donnybrook**

4 November 2021

### **Welcome**

We are in the fourth and final week of the letter to the Romans. As you will have noticed, at this point Paul is writing much more simply and directly. Yesterday, for example, he recalled a teaching of Jesus: all the commandment are summed up in this “you must love your neighbour as yourself.”

### **Topic**

Today’s reading is also direct and pastoral: do not sit in judgment on each other.

### **Steps**

When he wrote the letter, Paul had never been to Rome but he knew what was going on. And what was going deeply disturbed him. The Christ-believers of Jewish background insisted upon the full practice of the Law, especially the kosher rules and circumcision. The Christ-believers of Gentile background did not observe these rules. Each group looked down on the other. The Gentiles could declare: we have discovered a higher freedom and we are better than these benighted others. The Jews could declare: we are faithful to the Law given on Mount Sinai and so should every one else such.

Into that setting of conflict and confrontation, Paul reminds them that we all stand equally before God and sitting in judgement on each other is not what we are called to do. Each of us is accountable to God and to God alone. A few verses later on, the appearance of even-handedness slips and Paul is clearly on the side of the “liberals” but still he wants them all to act in lovingly towards each other.

### **Conclusion**

In our church today, there are also great divisions and tensions. You can see this at the higher level – the antagonism to Pope Francis can surprise. It can also be apparent locally, as different views of the Christian project and church emerge. So far, no normal.

This matters as for our synodal pathway we have just begun. It is easy to slip into liberal / conservative categories and even easier to regard each other with disdain. I do it myself. As we go forward, we will need to learn to respect each other precisely because all the commandments are summed up in love of neighbour. Today’s passage from St Paul is as very good starting point.