



## Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

April 8, 2021

### DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: tattoo-models.net

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

We live in a society that values personal freedom in a great deal. And I agree that after centuries of suppression and oppression of individual liberty, standards allowing free expression of thoughts and values without retaliation feels like fresh air let into a dungeon. The question still remains for me: how much my individualism may hurt others' wellbeing, feelings or rights?

This is not a novel question to humanity. The words of Apostle Paul come into my mind: **“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.**” (1 Corinthians 6:12)

I agree with the minister's point of view in the Scripture Insight below: *“what we believe prepares the way for how we behave”*. We have a choice whether to put our personal rights first, or we can choose to do what Jesus told to his disciples to do: **“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** (John 13:34)

When we decide to do our best to follow Jesus' command, it has two consequences in my understanding.

The first one is that we will need to make compromises when it comes to our 'personal rights' as we relate to one another. I appreciated the Our Daily Bread story about the Samoan men's rugby team's generous behaviour: knowing about the adverse associations of their tattoos in their hosts' culture, they chose to cover it up. Although it was part of who they were, out of respect they didn't insist on their right to display those patterns.

We, too, are called to practice this kind of self-limitation if it will prevent offending, harming or hurting others. In these pandemic times we can think about wearing masks for love's sake – even if it's uncomfortable and limits our personal freedom. We can think about watching out for others, and being open **“not to . . . do anything . . . that will cause your brother or sister to fall.”** (Romans 14:21)

The second consequence of committing ourselves to follow Jesus in this (from our culture's point of view) self-sacrificial way is that we may experience peace and joy that we would never gain from insisting to our self-actualization. Jesus promised to those who are willing to keep his instructions: **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”** (John 14:23)

With this companionship, developing **“the same mindset as Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 2:5) in our everyday decisions doesn't feel as a choking obligation after all, but something that we are empowered to do joyfully with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## Love Reins Us In

*It is better not to . . . do anything . . . that will cause your brother or sister to fall.*

Romans 14:21

### READ Romans 14:1–13

Most young Samoan boys receive a tattoo signaling their responsibility to their people and their chief. Naturally, then, the marks cover the arms of the Samoan men's rugby team members. Traveling to Japan where tattoos can carry negative connotations, the teammates realized their symbols presented a problem for their hosts. In a generous act of friendship, the Samoans wore skin-colored sleeves covering the designs. "We're respectful and mindful to . . . the Japanese way," the team captain explained. "We'll be making sure that what we're showing will be okay."

In an age emphasizing individual expression, it's remarkable to encounter self-limitation—a concept Paul wrote about in the book of Romans. He told us that love sometimes requires us to lay down our rights for others. Rather than pushing our freedom to the boundaries, sometimes love reins us in. The apostle explained how some people in the church believed they were free "to eat anything," but others ate "only vegetables" (Romans 14:2). While this might seem like a minor issue, in the first century, adherence to Old Testament dietary laws was controversial. Paul instructed everyone to "stop passing judgment on one another" (v. 13), before concluding with particular words for those who ate freely. "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall" (v. 21).

At times, loving another means limiting our own freedoms. We don't have to always do everything we're free to do. Sometimes love reins us in. – By **Winn Collier**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**God, help me to see where I need to encourage others to experience freedom and how I need to limit how I use my own freedoms. Amen.**

When have you seen people limit their freedom for the sake of other believers in Jesus? What was that like? What's difficult about those situations where love reins us in?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Paul's normal pattern for his church letters was to present a section of teaching (doctrine) followed by a section on living out one's faith (practice). As one pastor put it, what we believe prepares the way for how we behave. If Romans 1–11 provide the doctrine—Paul's careful explanation of the truth that the gospel is a message of grace freely offered to us by our gracious God—it should come as no surprise that in the practical portion of the letter (such as today's text), he would call us to extend and live out that grace in our relationships with one another.

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