

Barre Congregational Church

August 23, 2020: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser
~ Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost~

“Be Transformed by Renewing Your Mind”

(This sermon can be listened to on our Facebook Page and Website as part of our worship service)

Scripture Reading: Romans 12 v 1-2 and Matthew 16 v 13 - 20

I. Introduction:

We have entered the mid-to late summer season, and when I look at photos of our garden during the Spring and early summer, the plants and flowers look pretty nice, and fresh. The colors look bright and the leaves and grass a beautiful green. As the summer continued on, I can see the changes in the photos. Things start to fade some, especially with the extreme heat we have experienced. There is continued growth of seasonal fruits and veggies, but overall things are beginning to change. We have come to accept the seasons and their comings and goings. We may not like the change from one to the other, but seasonal change has become part of our lives.

I have used this word transformation, or to be transformed in this morning's theme so many times in my work in conflict transformation and reconciliation the last 27 years. I have used it in many different settings, with many different groups and institutions, and in many different contexts and cultures in all my travels, and it still is so important and powerful in how it works within and among people when faced with the need to change and to make things better for everyone. The work in conflict transformation helps and gives people the opportunity to change a situation of conflict into one where we overcome our differences, look for common ground and seek healing and reconciliation. It is about transforming the heart, the mind, and behaviors, so that everyone involved can find a way forward together.

Transformation is therefore about change from how something was before, and how we were before, how our circumstances were in the past, and how we and it can be transformed into a different place and way of being.

II. Be Transformed by Renewing Your Mind:

Paul in Romans 12 starts off by saying that these Roman Christians must offer their lives as living sacrifices that are pleasing and holy, to God. In the earlier days, animals were offered as sacrifice, but now, they must offer their own lives as sacrifices to God. The word “to urge” in the Greek language, *parakaleo*, means that there must be a turning point with an ethical implication, says New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce. You must offer your mind and your heart as living sacrifice. It must be a spiritual act of worship. In the previous few verses, he gives a doxology, a worshipful exclamation of the depth and the riches of the mind of God. God is amazing, and we do not understand God, but this God bends down to us to reveal the depth of that knowledge to us through the Spirit of God. To God be all the glory!

After that doxology, he then urged the Roman Christians in Romans 12 v 2 to not conform any more to the patterns or the ways of the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The world has become wicked, he already said in the first Chapter of Romans, so that is not what is expected of you as Christians. Be transformed! This word transformed in the Greek, *metamorphoo* is the same word that is used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17 v 1 – 2, where Jesus’ face shone like the sun, and His clothes were white as the light. The ways of the world are dark and wicked, and that is not how you ought to be. Your heart and your mind must shine brightly to others because you are filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit. Let that Spirit of light and brightness shine through everything you think and say, and in all you do. Transform this world, do not conform to it.

So, why do they need to transform their minds? To be able to discern what God’s will is, and what is pleasing to God. Also, the text continues in Romans 12 saying that you must renew your minds, because you are in community with one another, where every person, every member is different from the other, and has different gifts according to God’s will.

III. The Church as our Rock and Foundation:

In Matthew 16, we see Jesus and the disciples settling in after another journey in the region of Caesarea Philippi, in the Northeast of Galilee. Jesus must have been thinking a lot

about His own identity, and He knew that the time had come for Him to go down to Judea, and then on to Jerusalem where He would experience much sacrifice. He felt that the time was right to ask the disciples about who they and the crowds thought He was.

The question, who the people think He is, and who the disciples think He is, is answered by Peter, the spokesperson for the other disciples. They, the people, think you are a prophet, like Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist, which was a normal perception by people who only knew the stories about the OT prophets, and Jesus was quite a prophet in their eyes. But we believe You are the Son of the Living God, Simon Peter says. This statement was a climax in their relationship and identification with Jesus. This is a watershed for them and for Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus says, “You are Peter, meaning rock, and on this rock, I will build my church, my ekklesia, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. We see later on that Peter went forth and became a leader in the early development of the church. Ekklesia in this context is the assembly of the people of God. You are the rock of my assembly, not the ekklesia of Israel, but a new assembly, renewed in spirit and mind, and this assembly, this church cannot be overcome and destroyed by Hades, meaning the place of darkness and death, of hell. It cannot be destroyed by negativity. Why? Because this assembly is a living organism with Christ and the Holy Spirit in the center of it. What powerful words.

IV. We are all in this together, in our differences:

In my work in conflict transformation with churches, schools, social service agencies, people from all walks of life, including Palestinians and Israelis, I have encountered people in conflict with such different mindsets, belief systems, perspectives of how things need to be done and decided upon. I am so intrigued about the human mind and the human heart, how these two things influence and impact the way things are and how things are being directed. I have seen how differences in beliefs and culture and socio-political and religious persuasions, the way things should be done, can either build a group or community or a church, or how it can break it apart. Paul knew that too, and he warns these Christians to not be stuck in the old way of being and doing things, but to renew, transform their minds. Be flexible because you are in community with others. Change things up in your mind!

We are all in this ekklesia of Jesus Christ and Paul. We are urged this morning by the word of God to allow our minds and our hearts to be transformed and renewed. The church of today is called to be a rock, a foundation in a world so divided, so wicked, so dark at times. This church, us must be a rock, a foundation where the light must shine like Jesus' face shone, through our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We have many opportunities today to be this kind of presence. We have a pandemic that has created situations where we must find new ways of being church, do our work. We also see many different beliefs and opinions and conflicts in how things should and must be done. Let this word of God renew all our minds and al our Spirits this morning, and may God make us instruments where we are to be that light in places where it might be uncomfortable to speak up, to be the change. May God give us courage and the will to be transformed, like the seasons change willingly as the days and the months pass by.

God bless us all

Amen