

Sermon

Year A Proper 16

8.27.23

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Good morning, St. Dunstan's!

We are almost in the smack dab middle of Ordinary Time. Today marks the 13th Sunday after Pentecost. Pentecost Sunday marks the end of Eastertide. Ordinary Time runs from the Sunday after Pentecost and continues until late fall, where rumor has it, temperatures dip under triple digits, when Ordinary Time ends, the first Sunday Advent begins.

The liturgical season of Ordinary Time runs for roughly 29 weeks.

Did you know that the term “ordinary time” is **not** used in the Prayer Book. It's the longest season of the church.

It may be referred to as the “green season,” because green is the liturgical color

I recently read “If Advent, Lent and Easter are the glitzy celebrities at the liturgical party, Ordinary Time is the plain aunt, collecting all the dirty dishes afterward. We almost forget she's there.”

I love the season of Ordinary Time. I really think it's my favorite. You see, our lives are made up of simple, ordinary days. Those conventional days begin to add up, then our quotidian time become years, which creates this beautiful tapestry we call: life. We celebrate life in all different ways. Gifts, parties, trips.

Remember the time you would go to the store and look for what seemed hours on end to find 'the perfect card' for that someone special?

I remember searching for a birthday card, I think it was for my mom, but I don't exactly remember who the card was for, I just remember what it said,

"How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are?"

Think about that for a minute.

How old **would** you be, if you did not know how old you are?

This saying is attributed to many people: a famous baseball player Satchel Paige, popular motivational author Wayne W. Dyer, and others.

The earliest attribution I found, was in a sermon from 1927. The pastor said,

"We make ourselves old by keeping tally of the years. How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are? Properly, a man is as old as he feels.
... Birthdays are an annoyance and a delusion."

I like how author Richard R. Gariepy, phrased it another way,

“I frequently ask someone who is concerned about his age and is afraid to begin some new venture,

“How old would you be if you didn’t know your age? If you had forgotten your birthdate and the records had been lost, how old would you be? You would be

as old or as young as you feel,

as old as your doubts and fears ,

and as young as your hopes and desires.”

Which brings me to our epistle reading found in the book of Romans. This letter is named for its recipients, a community of **young** believers in Christ in the city of Rome.

These new believers were ‘young in the faith’ because our faith itself was young.

We have no way of knowing the ages of those who actually received this letter.

I have no doubt their ages varied. This new faith soon was called Christianity and became a world changing movement.

Epistle in Greek word ‘epistole’ means letter.

An ‘epistole’ or letter is a writing directed or sent to a singular person or group of people, usually an elegant and formal didactic letter.

An 'epistole' **originally** referred to an oral communication sent by messenger.

There were different types of letters in the Greco Roman period just as we have different letters or email. There were imperial decrees addressed to subjects in specific areas of the empire.

There were philosophical letters of formal rhetoric.

Documentary letters were sent to deal with problems such as urging an absent husband or son to return or to complete business transactions. Of course, there were many private letters found in antiquity.

Often the letter was dictated to a scribe who would be the actual transcriber for the sender. We know that Paul did not physically write some of his letters. The Book of Romans closes with the following statement,

I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.

(Romans 16:22)

we find that the actual person who physically wrote the Book of Romans was a man named Tertius.

Scribes would use costly parchment, made of animal skins that had been scraped, burnished, and stitched together. You didn't simply stop by Hobby Lobby or Office Depot to pick up lovely paper.

When Paul's letter arrived in Rome, hardly anyone read it, certainly no one of influence.

There was much to read in Rome- government decrees, exquisite poetry and theatrical plays,

finely crafted moral philosophy- and much of it was world-class. And yet in no time, this letter of Romans left all those other writings in obscurity. Paul's letter to the Romans has had a far greater impact on its readers than all the tomes of any of the ancient Roman writers.

Today finds us with Paul addressing the new community of believers. He is encouraging the believers to live a life different than to what was culturally accepted.

In Romans chapter 12, vs 1 & 2 we read,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul is asking the new followers to live counter-culturally.

Why?

Because in the Greco-Roman world, life was hard!

Women had few rights, if any. Respectable women stayed in the confines of their home and were expected to bear heirs. The whole society stifled any women's self-expression. Yet, in verse 1, Paul specifically addresses the brothers and SISTERS. The Greco-Roman world was full of unmitigated chauvinistic attitudes. Children were basically treated half human and not recognized until puberty. People lived in a culture of violence. Hatred and revenge were not something to be ashamed of but were a matter of pride and just routine life. Forgiveness was not part of their vernacular. To forgive was seen as feeble and cowardly. They had to constantly watch their backs and the backs of family: pillaging, rape and murder were a visible part of everyday living. In this poly-theistic society, one was always having to sacrifice something to appease a certain god to gain favor in order to have protection and live.

Christianity was a breath of fresh air for the soul to those who lived in this polytheistic society. And for anyone today. Following Jesus of Nazareth and His teaching was opposite to what people saw.

Christianity offers love- a selfless love not full of self-centered ambition.

It offers peace- the attitude of social harmony, forgiveness and grace

Romans 12: 1 & 2 from the Message version of the Bible by Eugene Peterson, says it this way,

So, here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, **ordinary** life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

2 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.

Instead, fix your attention on God.

You'll be changed from the inside out.

Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity,

God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

This writing of St. Paul inspired a whole new movement the world had never known. The movement of Jesus Christ – God becoming human, an innocent -suffering and dying on our behalf, undeserving of betrayal, resurrecting and conquering death, offering a new way of life: offering forgiveness, peace, joy, grace, and unconditional love.

Paul urges those who read and hear this letter to respond to this good news by offering their whole selves... their everyday life —to God as a “living sacrifice.” Paul and the society around him knew oh so well that sacrifices end in death, not life. But the sacrifice of Jesus changed

everything. Jesus' resurrection steals life from death and makes it possible for those who trust in Him to become a sacrifice and yet live.

But how do we live?

Paul taught Jesus. The teachings of Jesus were the exact opposite of what existed around them.

Where Women are valued and Children are loved.

Paul taught people then in the Greco Roman world and today, how to love each other selflessly rather than taking each other for granted.

We do not live as before, wrapping ourselves in our own world, in our own selfish concerns, caught in the confines of what determines life around us. We live in continuous state of being renewed and transformation of our minds.

Transformed individuals become the transformed community.

How are we transformed? By fixing our attention on God-accepting God's transformative grace, spending time in God's Word, praying and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit because of Jesus.

Then we will be changed from the inside out.. especially in the beautiful daily, ordinary-ness of life.

Amen