

## Redesigned For Ministry

Philippians 2:1-5

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

September 27, 2020 – Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. You don't have to be around this wonderful God of ours for very long before you begin to understand that He loves the remodeling business! What I mean is He loves to redesign things – to transform things – to change things – to make all things new. All of which means that He loves to transform, change, and remodel people – and in His Word we find one example after another of this. Consider our first parents. When Adam and Eve lived in Eden's Garden it was paradise in every sense of the word – that is, until Satan and sin entered the picture – until Adam and Eve decided to go their own way – until their relationship with God was destroyed – until they began to blame Both God and one another for what had happened.

All of a sudden *everything* was broken – and still is. It was no longer paradise. All at once sin was there – death was there – until finally – condemned, bewildered, confused, and lost – Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden. But God loves the remodeling business. Instead of allowing Adam and Eve to remain in their sin – instead of condemning them forever – God greeted them outside the Garden and said: “You don't have to hide from Me. I'm the One who made you – the One who loves you – the One who can forgive you. I will send you a Savior and remember your sin no more.” It wasn't the way God planned it. It was a new plan, a new design, a remodeling job, if you will – but then, God loves the remodeling business.

And how about God's Prophet, Jeremiah? One day God sent him to a potter's home where a man was working with a lump of clay destined to be a thing of great beauty. Round and round the potter's wheel went. At first it was only clay and water, but by the skill of the potter's hands it began to take shape. Then suddenly the pot wasn't smooth anymore, but was falling apart – shredding in the potter's hands. Soon it would be good for nothing – no longer a beautiful pot, but a lump of slimy mud. But this potter wasn't about to give up on his creation. He would redesign that cracked pot. In his hands the lump of clay would once again take on the shape that was in the potter's head. Soon it would again be a thing of great beauty. Then, as Jeremiah was admiring the redesigned, remodeled pot, God spoke: “Can I not do with Israel what this potter has done? Can I not forgive them, redeem them, and transform them so that they, too, can once more be a thing of beauty?” As Jeremiah learned, God loves the remodeling business!

And then there was the Apostle, Peter, a man who followed Jesus closely – who was committed to the Lord – who had made all kinds of promises to Him. But here also was someone who in the very next breath could also say: “I've

never heard of the Man!” And Jesus, who was standing close by, heard Peter's every word. But even after His resurrection Jesus didn't ask Peter *why* he had done this. He didn't ask him to promise he would never do it again. He didn't ask him to walk on water. He didn't even ask him if he loved sheep. He simply said to him: “Do you love *Me*, Peter? Then feed My sheep. Take care of My Church.” By grace Peter was forgiven, restored, and called into Christ's ministry. He was changed from one who could say, “I don't know the Man!” to one who would later proclaim boldly, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name by which we can be saved.”

It would be fascinating to be able to walk through the pages of Bible history and observe the love and grace of God at work – transforming, redesigning, and remodeling one person after another. For some the change would be dramatic – like St. Paul, who suddenly – in the midst of his pursuit of God's people to persecute them – was knocked to the ground with a brilliant burst of white light and heard God say: “I have a new road for you to travel – a road on which you'll persecute no one. You'll share the Good News of My salvation – speak and write about My grace, mercy, forgiveness and love – and I will be with you.” Paul was redesigned by Christ to become the greatest Christian missionary the world has ever known.

Yet, while some of these people had dramatic conversions, others experienced God's grace in much more subtle ways. But in *every* case we have to confess that God was the One who was working – the One who was busily redesigning and remodeling people's lives. Some would ask if God is still at it – if He still loves the remodeling business – if He's still busy transforming and redesigning. Some might feel God has given up or developed a new plan – but they would be wrong. God's plan today is the same as it's always been. His love and mercy moves Him to do what He does, and there's no way that could ever change! It's that same eternal grace – that same unchangeable love in Jesus Christ – that moves God to redesign and remodel His children. We have His Word on it. God loves the remodeling business!

But how does He carry that work out? He does it first in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, which to us it looks like nothing more than ordinary water. But when that ordinary water is mingled with the very Word of God – that same Word which brought our worlds into being – God is there to meet and greet sinners – no matter their size – and to grant the blessings of His kingdom. We have nothing to do with it! He is the One who does it all. There in that water God is actively at work giving love, grace, faith, forgiveness and a new life that never ends. In that water God is busy changing,

transforming and remodeling fallen humankind – one heart at a time. I was redesigned there, and so were you. I was made His child there, and so were you. I was given heaven there, and so were you! Can you even begin to imagine the wonder of it all – even in your wildest imagination? It’s a thought far beyond our ability to comprehend, and yet we do – because God loves the remodeling business!

But the Baptismal font isn’t the only place God is busy with His remodeling. Every time you hear your pastor speak God’s Word of forgiveness in Holy Absolution God is busy redesigning your life. Each time you step forward to receive the very body and blood of our Savior in His Supper, God Himself is actively there present to remodel you. There in the flesh and blood of the Savior – given and shed for your sins – God is carrying out the tasks of His remodeling business. Whenever you leave His Table you walk away from it a new person – forgiven and redeemed in Christ Jesus – with the Words of God’s blessing still ringing in your ears, “And now this, the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ *will* keep you steadfast in that one true faith unto life everlasting. Depart in peace, *your Sins are forgiven!* Amen.” In that holy meal God *has* forgiven you – strengthened you – remodeled you – empowered you for Christian living – and called you to service in His kingdom.

In this morning’s text St. Paul describes how God not only redesigned an individual or two, but how He remodeled and redesigned an entire congregation! The congregation at Philippi seemed to love their pastor – Paul. He praised them – prayed for them – and worked with them. Theirs was a congregation that was thrilled to worship their Savior – and it would seem that Paul couldn’t give them thanks enough for their faith, support, love, service, and partnership in sharing the Gospel. He called them “blessed by God,” and “saints of Christ.” But this blessed and greatly gifted congregation – this group of powerful witnesses and workers – these people who had brought their pastor so much joy – had lost their focus. Instead of concentrating on Jesus and *His* mission, they were fixating on themselves.

They needed redesigning, and so Paul didn’t mince words. He loved them and was willing to “put it on the line.” And, while it’s true that Paul was here talking to the Philippians he could just as easily be talking to our Parish – and to each and every one of us individually. “Something is wrong!” he says. “I can hardly believe my ears. I’ve heard you’re not as united as you once were – that you’ve lost your focus – that you’ve forgotten your true mission. But I’ve heard something else. I’ve heard you’re focusing on yourselves and on your own ‘mission’ – that there’s sometimes rivalry, fighting, strife, pride, and conceit among you. Is it true that you’re interested only in serving yourselves – that you sometimes lose your team spirit – and that sometimes you can’t work together?”

“My dear Philippians, I’ve heard you’re so busy protecting your own turf, your own ideas, and your own ways that the kingdom work is suffering – that you yourselves are hurting one another. This cannot continue!” Those are tough words – tough for them, and tough for us. How often – I ask you – how often *is* Christ’s mission detoured because of us? How often have we hindered the work of our Lord because the “team spirit” is gone – and because sometimes even the Holy Spirit Himself is ignored? Whenever your concentration is focused inside yourself, there’s no room left for God. But listen again to St. Paul as he talks about God’s task of redesigning people – as he talks not only to the Philippians, but more importantly, to us!

“Dear friends and partners in the Gospel,” he says. “Because you have such a close relationship with Jesus – because He keeps sharing His love with you – because the Spirit lives in you – because He’s served you with compassion – because you’ve been to Bethlehem and Calvary and Jesus’ empty tomb – Christ *will* redesign you, remodel you, and change your focus. God loves the remodeling business, and by His grace He *will* remodel you. He *will* redesign your mission here in this world. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and His love is so simple, but in spite of its simplicity that age-old Gospel message is still *the* driving force that moves and changes people’s hearts. That’s why we love it, proclaim it, support it, and believe it. When you embrace the Gospel – when you’ve been remodeled by the grace of Christ – you *will* be filled with joy in the Lord – you *will* see your love for one another demonstrated in the Parish family – you *will* see true harmony as you serve together to bring that blessed Gospel to others.

What a congregation the Philippians would later become by the grace and power of Christ and His Gospel. They would become a joy to Paul, to the Lord, and a powerful witness to the world because they had been redesigned by Christ. What an example for us to follow as God’s Holy Spirit dwells richly in us. God here holds before our eyes a congregation filled with love, joy and peace – a congregation truly remodeled by Christ – a congregation reaching out in Christ’s name to the world! What a blessing it is to be the people of God – and to serve Him both here in this life and also in the next. What a blessing it is when God is at work amongst His people. Even as God has blessed us with His presence and power in redesigning us for service in His kingdom, my prayer is that He will always so grant us these blessings for many more years to come – as together we walk into eternity as brothers and sisters in Christ – redesigned forever in the image of Him who came to die that we might live – even Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.