

During World War II, while a minister at Church of the Good Shepherd in Lee, London, J. B. Phillips found the young people in his church did not understand the Authorised Version of the Bible, the King James Version.

He used the time in the bomb shelters during the London Blitz, to begin a translation of the New Testament into modern English, starting with the Epistle to the Colossians.

The results appealed to the young people who found it easier to understand.

He printed his paraphrases as he translated them in pamphlet form which became popular with British troops.

After the war, he began in earnest to complete the collection paraphrasing all the books of the New Testament.

Let's hear the Phillips paraphrase of the Romans reading today.

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers [and sisters], as an act of intelligent worship, to give [God] your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to [God] and acceptable by God]. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all [God's] commands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

“As your spiritual teacher I give this piece of advice to each one of you. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all. For just as you have many members in one physical body and those members differ in their functions, so we, though many in number, compose one body in Christ and are all members of one another. Through the grace of God we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others, let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching, let us give all we have

to our teaching; and if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others, let us set ourselves to it. Let the [person] who is called to give, give freely; let the [person] who wields authority think of [their] responsibility; and let the [person] who feels sympathy for [their friends] act cheerfully.

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God.. Give [God] your bodies as a sacrifice, consecrated to God. Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold. Let God re-mold you from within and move toward the goal of true maturity.”

You can hear why Phillips was popular.

He used language that was modern and simple.

After eleven chapters of pretty dense theology,

Paul says, “Therefore”

and he launches into a series of admonitions
for the Christians of Rome.

First, he begins with how they are to dedicate themselves to God as an offering.

Then, they are to remold their thinking to think like Christ.

They are to be different from the society at large.

Jim Klopstock reminded us that by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, it is likely that the house churches there were dominated by Gentile Christians.

Jewish Christians had been banished by the Emperors.

Paul had to spend a good deal of time helping them understand the Gospel as he knew it,
interpreting the faith of Abraham,
describing Christ as a New Adam,
and helping and supporting them in their faith.

Paul speaks to us today, nearly two thousand years later.

Our scripture readings and the paraphrase tell us how to live also. For Paul, worship is full bodied.

In our terminology today, worship is part of our incarnation.

It is sacramental.

Incarnation means we are embodied for worship
and out of worship comes service.

Our service is sacramental in that it is our offering
of ourselves to God in Christ.

In ancient times when ever the whole body was alluded to it meant that
all of the zones of interaction were involved.

Each involving actions of parts of the body:
the zone of emotion-fused thought,
the zone of self-expressive speech
and the zone of purposeful action.

Paul goes on to tell us that the church is made up
of many and diverse parts: prophecy, ministry, teaching,
exhortation, giving, leading, compassion and cheerfulness.

But he also cautions,

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to
think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think
with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that
God has assigned.”

In other words, the Gospel is not about us, but about God in Christ.
One of the major features of the Bible is stories of transformation.

Today, we began the story of Moses.

As a preview of coming attractions,
Moses kills an Egyptian guard,
escapes to the desert where he encounters God
in the burning bush.

He is transformed when God tells him to tell Pharaoh
to “let my people go.”

The last few weeks we have been hearing the Joseph story,
generations before Moses.

Through no fault of his own, Joseph finds himself in Egypt.
There he becomes the right hand to the Pharaoh,
yet he never seems to have lost the faith of his father,

Jacob now named Israel.

When he confronts his brothers and identifies himself,
he forgives them and points out “for God sent me
before you to preserve life.”

The story that precedes the Joseph story is about Jacob.

Early in the Jacob story, he proves to be a total jerk.

But God uses him too.

After tricking Esau, his brother, and then running away,
he is confronted by Esau who forgives Jacob.

The story before that is about Isaac and his relationship with Ishmael.

That too ends in transformation of their relationship

The story before that is the story of Abraham

and his encounter with God. It is full of transformation.

In the New Testament there is no greater transformation
than that of Peter.

Today’s reading tells us that Peter is first to identify
Jesus as the Messiah the Son of the Living God,
but later Peter denies Jesus three times.

Then after the resurrection,

Peter becomes the principal leader of the church.

Father David told the story of Paul

who changed from the persecutor of the church
to its greatest missionary.

It’s hard to believe that the man who was present
at the stoning of Stephen is the man who wrote
the letter to the Romans.

That’s transformation!

You and I can be transformed too.

In fact it is an imperative in one who wants to live a Christian life.

Using the PMBI, the Polk method of Biblical interpretation,
by reading the passage in reverse.

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould,
but let God re-mould your minds from within,
so that you may prove in practice

that the plan of God for you is good,
meets all his demands and moves towards
the goal of true maturity.”

“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.”

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God,
I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship,
to give him your bodies,
as a living sacrifice,
consecrated to him and acceptable by him. “

“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.”

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