

Sermon Text for February 26, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Matthew 17:1-7, Romans 12:1-2

“Renewing our Minds”

What a crazy week it has been. That warm weather was nice, it got the Bronkemas thinking about their garden and we decided to clear out almost a whole row of hedges. Anyone who has been to my house and knows those hedges, also knows what’s in those hedges. I’m pretty sure it is poison ivy, I know that it is some kind of poison, because a few of you got it when 6 years ago you went and cleaned out the property. I get it every year but I was determined that this time that we were tearing out the hedges and it might be my last run in with it, I was determined that I wasn’t going to get it, just because I didn’t think I was going to get it. So I tore into that hedge like there was no tomorrow thinking mind over matter, I won’t get the poison ivy if I don’t think about it. It is a good thing that I have a robe on because I have poison ivy literally from the tip of my nose all the way down to the top of my foot and in places in between that I didn’t think you could get it. When you try to pit mind over matter, in this case at least, matter wins.

But that’s the way we are, I’ll speak for myself but probably for you too, we think if we just try hard enough, or just are disciplined enough, or make up our mind about something then we can do it, we can overcome it, we have what it takes, our willpower can overcome. Someone we know did 4 funerals this past week for heroin overdose cases. There is an example where you simply cannot overcome it with your willpower. You have to go away for months, change things around completely in your life for months, be completely transformed if you are going to have any chance of kicking the user mentality for good. I’ll never forget in Italy when we worked at the orphanage driving through the streets of Naples at 2 in the morning picking up our kids whose parents had passed out on the sidewalk from drug usage and the kids were just waiting for them to wake up. We can’t just try to make things right, we have to do things that take us out of what we are used to and take our mindset to a different place than I can do this on my own if I just try hard enough.

On Wednesday we begin Lent with our three Ash Wednesday services. Today is Transfiguration Sunday where we hear what does it take to have our minds renewed whether we are addicted to heroin, can’t stay away from porn, or find ourselves in a rut, or if we just want to be sure our family is on the right track. Why do we celebrate Transfiguration Sunday? Why not

loaves and fish Sunday, or beatitude Sunday, or water to wine Sunday, we'd have a full house on that day. We celebrate Transfiguration Sunday because it answers a question that Jesus asks his disciples in 16:15: Who do you say that I am? That question is answered today.

Today, we see that how we answer that question: who is Jesus to us, who do we say that Jesus is for us, will determine whether we are transformed by a renewal of our minds or conformed to time and era in which we live, which can lead to some really dangerous consequences. Let's read.

READ NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

I really enjoyed having Phil Skotte with us this past week, but I especially loved the premise of the uniqueness of Jesus which shows that he will never go away. He won't go away historically for sure, but does he wax and wane in our lives? Let's look at our first Scripture. The transfiguration takes place in chapter 16 right after Peter answers Jesus' question in 16 of who do you say that I am? Peter answers: the Messiah, the son of the living God. Jesus commends him and calls him blessed.

So today, the story continues, as he climbs the mountain with James, John, and of course, Jesus, he's feeling pretty good about himself. Kind of like I felt when I started ripping out those bushes. They came out so easily. Peter is the superstar favorite disciple. Once they arrive Jesus is transfigured, he becomes dazzling white and some OT superstar favorites appear. Peter thinks this is all happening for him, it is all about him after all. Good thing I'm here Jesus, because I can hook you up with a sweet pad if you wanted your buddies to hang around. For Peter it was less important who Jesus was to him but more important who Peter was to Jesus.

You see, Peter got it right earlier, Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is the Son of the living God. He was blessed, he had a relationship. He followed Jesus and sacrificed for him, he repented. But he still betrayed him. We get in that trap where we think of all we can do for Jesus, like attending church for God, or being good for God, or being good fathers and mothers for God, or being good husbands and wives for God, when all along it should be that God has done all of this for us, we are just responding.

God's voice comes from heaven and first answers that previous question that Jesus asked, just in case they forgot: Who is Jesus? This is my beloved Son, or as Phil said last week, God incarnate, God himself and then gave us a clue on how to be renewed by saying: listen to him.

Paul in Romans 12, yes we are still in Romans but we jumped ahead a bit for this Sunday because of the obvious link between the transfiguration of Jesus and the transformation that

ought to take place in our lives when our minds are renewed with the realization of who exactly Jesus is. Let's begin in vs. 1 and what you will find is that these verses follow a sequence which builds one upon another. We begin by Paul appealing to the Romans. I appeal to you, I beseech you. He had never been to Rome, he did not know the church first hand but he feels a brotherly love for them that he can speak to them honestly and forcefully. Paul loves this church, he considers it his own. I have loved every church where I have served: Italy, Florida, Russia. I continue to have connections and friends at these places that have made an impact on my life, brothers and sisters in Christ.

I feel like Paul, I can speak to you with affection, but honestly and with confidence. How we answer the question of who Jesus is to us will dictate how our lives are lived. Paul begins by speaking about our bodies and how they need to be presented to God as a living sacrifice. It is in this time of year that we think about the sacrifices which we will make over Lent. We often focus on spiritual disciplines which deprive our bodies of those things which we need and crave. We may fast or some give up chocolate or something else and mark it down as a hardship.

But this isn't what Paul has in mind. The sacrifices of his time were dead animals presented to God by them being sacrificed. But Paul states that what God wants is not a dead animal, but rather our very lives, our bodies, our everything, which reflects that Jesus is our everything. Thinking that fasting or giving up chocolate, or for Paul's day sacrificing an animal, is sufficient for our duty, is nothing short of fooling ourselves. God wants our lives.

When we present our bodies, our very lives, it should be normal. There are a couple important words in these verses that I want to lift up. Where it states: "which is your 'spiritual' worship". The word for spiritual in the Greek is logike. It is your logical or what comes naturally for you. It is a normal course of events after a transformation that you would present yourself to God because your mind has been renewed. It should come naturally, logically, almost as a form of worship when we are able to answer the question: who is Jesus for me in a way that reflects that Jesus is my everything. Logic, flowing naturally from the mind, is what God provides us, but we are getting to that.

When Paul begins in vs.2 we find ourselves with another word which needs to be looked at closely. Do not be conformed to this – world, that is what our pew Bible says. But the Greek word is eon, which means literally age or time. Do not let yourselves be shaped by what everyone else is doing around you. That's what it is saying. Do not be conformed to the 21st

century. Do not fall prey to the toxic culture where no one listens to each other. Don't think it is normal to hate people who think differently than you do.

What did Robert Frost say: I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference. Do not be conformed to this world, and if you are not, it will make all the difference. Being transformed might put us at a military disadvantage, is it worth it? Being transformed might put us at an economic disadvantage, is it worth it? Being transformed might put our lives at risk, is it worth it?

When did the church start taking its order from this age, from the world and not from Scripture. When I criticized the 21st century approach on sexuality, I speak from the authority of Scripture. When I speak about the 21st century approach to how we deal and care for the foreigner I speak from the authority of Scripture. I don't follow political parties, I don't make decisions based on who is in power, I speak from the authority of Scripture. If we can answer the question that Jesus ask: who do you say that I am, was have to answer it according to Scripture and not according to this age.

Paul sets up a real dichotomy between being conformed to this time versus being transformed by the renewing of our minds. What would it take to get us as a church out of this toxic time. How do we renew our minds, how can we be transformed. It really isn't as difficult as we make it. What if we focus on children and take the momentum that Melanie has given us and take it to another level? What if we honor those families that are having babies with a special display of care and affection so that they know that they are loved. What if we walk alongside young married couples as they try to figure out each other in the midst of careers and life? What if we focus on youth as they stumble through life in the midst of this opioid crisis.

What if we focused on married couples who've been married and have a bunch of kids and just need to be renewed. What if we focus on older adults as we find ourselves in the midst of the fastest growing area for retirees in the nation. What if we answered the question who is Jesus to us with the words that he is the lover of my soul, the beloved. We would then not do that which would cause enmity between us and others for the sake of this age and the arguments of this time. We would be uplifting those around us. II Corinthians 5:17 tells us: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new."

There is a way in which this can happen for us and take us directly out of this age, while still being relevant in this age. There is a Greek word which means to change our mind. In the

Greek it is metanoia. Guess what word we use for it in English, it means change our mind and it is metanoia. Repentance. When we repent, we renew our minds, we become transformed, we listen to the direction of Almighty God.

We need to go back to that mountain and listen to the voice from heaven which tells us not to be afraid. It is scary raising kids today. I can't believe in a year and a bit Stacy and I will be empty nesters. It seems like yesterday when we had arrived back in the states with little Rachel when she was 2 on the beaches of St. Augustine and she was completely naked running around on the sand at the beach. People didn't like that, but it was what we did in Italy. We put a swimming suit on her next time we went out. It is hard raising kids in the 21st century. Where can we get guidance and direction at this crucial time in all of our lives? That's our job, this where we can come in and help. We are not a church, we are a community that is looking to have our minds renewed and our lives transformed in Jesus Christ so that we can offer our very lives to the son of God.

I feel like singing in closing out this sermon. Let's sing Sanctuary: