

Sermon Text for July 23, 2017

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Hosea 2:16-20, Romans 8:1-8

“Setting your mind on Christ”

It is great to be back home again. We had a transformative mission trip where 14 of our youth and adults met up with 19 youth and adults from a Presbyterian Church in Texas and we did mission. We divided into three groups and the first day some of us served in a soup kitchen and then sorted clothes to give to those who didn't have. Some of us went to a Presbyterian nursing home and cleaned stairwells, cleaned up trash outdoors, washed resident's dogs. Some of us went to a home for children with disabilities. It was significant. Throughout these days our relationships with each other and with the group from Texas only got stronger. That doesn't always happen. The youth that we have are amazing. Their relationships with each other and with Jesus only got stronger.

It was a significant mission trip. I would need the whole day to tell you about Wednesday. It was also significant, but that will be for another day. We are home now. A community within this community who has had a life experience which for some was transformative. But you didn't have that experience with us. We want you to have experiences in this family that are transformative, that make you more mature in Jesus Christ, that point to the faith that has been gifted to us by Jesus Christ. Thank you for your support of this mission trip. It was an important one in the life of this church.

Isn't it amazing what you can accomplish when you set your mind on something and don't let it go until that task is completed. We've been planning this mission trip since a year ago this month. Today, in fact, we have our first parent meeting for those who have youth who might be going to Italy. You have to set your mind on something in order for it to succeed. Today in Romans Paul teaches us what setting our mind on Christ can produce and what setting our minds on the flesh, that which goes against Christ, can produce. Today we get the very simple advice that we are to live our lives with our minds set constantly on the Spirit of God and allow that Spirit and that goal to direct us.

Think of what can happen in our lives when we allow one thing in our lives to sway us and direct us at times without us even knowing that it has such a powerful influence. OJ Simpson had everything going for him but his desires, his inability to set his mind on that which is not of the flesh put him in a situation where he had to spend 9 years in prison. Some think that is not enough, but it is an example of setting our minds on anything that might even just miss the mark of what God would want us to do is dangerous and is like that worm on the computer that silently and insidiously eats its way through our files and through our lives until one day you read on your screen system is shutting down. It isn't until that moment when we realize how much of an impact this one action, this one desire has impacted our lives. It is then that we have to reboot, start all over again and set our minds, for real this time on Christ.

Today we will see that our task is to set our minds on Christ and let God do the rest. This setting our mind on Christ will give us what we all truly need, and want, and that is a place of safety and peace.

READ

So today we are beginning a mini series within a series. We are looking at Romans, Faith for Dummies, but chapter 8 has to be the most important chapter in all of Scripture. Did you hear me say that? It is valuable and precious and there are concepts and truths in this chapter that we find in no other chapter in Scripture. So this mini series as we make our way through chapter 8 will be called pieces of 8. Pieces of 8 are gold coins that were often collected by pirates. They were originally produced by Spain and they were the largest and the most precious of the gold coins. We are going to capture them as our booty over these next few months. We are going to gather and collect these pieces of 8, from chapter 8 of Romans, and I pray that they will have an impact on your life similar to the impact that this mission trip has had on the life of our teens.

These last few weeks Paul has given us one guilt trip after another. We know what we are supposed to do, but we just don't do it, but thanks be to God that God still loves us and forgives us. Today we start off our reading in Paul with the reassuring words that we have been waiting for all these weeks: For now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are taken from the guilt that we all have because our actions so often betray our allegiance to that which is other than God.

This first sentence tells us we no longer have to brood and sulk about our past and what might have been and how we have fallen short but rather that now we are no longer guilty, we have been set free by Christ and whether we know it or appreciate it or not, we are free to live guilt free.

How many of you are still haunted by your past and have a really hard time forgiving yourself for what has been? You want to move on, you want to start over again, reboot, but your guilt and your condemnation of yourself just won't let you do it. Paul says, and begins our reading today by saying that in Christ there is no condemnation. Just soak that up as we continue along in these verses.

Hosea, our first reading, is a very, very unusual book of the Bible. The story goes that Hosea is a prophet and is commanded by God to marry a prostitute who continues to be a prostitute even after their marriage. It is supposed to be an example of God marrying Israel and Israel continues to be unfaithful to God even after God has called her "his people". The same can be said for us and Christ. Jesus chose us to be his people, he died for us, rose again, claimed us as his own even knowing all along that we would be, and continue to be unfaithful. But in Hosea there comes a time when this harlot, his wife, the people of Israel, Christians, there will be a day when there will be no more Baals, a Hebrew word meaning master, but also a word that was used in Babylonian literature which meant gods. So what we have here is the prophet saying that you will come and throw away your idols, your gods and worship and want to worship only me. You will set your mind away from the others and set them only on me.

The result of this setting our mind on God is found at the very end of verse 18: I will make you lie down in safety. Think of what that means for an Old Testament prostitute to be able to lie down in safety, think of what it means to the Israelites surrounded by hostile nations to be able to lie down in safety. What does it mean to us today living in a country where our policies are directed so that we keep people out so that ostensibly we can lie down in safety? Is it important for you to be able to lie down safely in your bed without the fear of bombs dropping on your head? Ask a Syrian refugee, they will tell you how they long to lie down in safety.

How can you lie down in safety, with a peace that comes from that safety, because the prophet has been able to get his unfaithful wife, God has been able to gather his unfaithful people to set their minds upon God.

Paul picks up on that theme when we come to Romans chapter 8. You need to know that not only is Romans 8 in the middle of Romans literally, but it is the chapter that contains the most meat of any other chapter. If you wanted to skip seminary and learn all the theology you needed to know to be a pastor, or to be a Christian, all you would need to do is read and understand chapter 8 of Romans.

Paul tells us, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Once we realize that we are not condemned it should free us to set our minds on Christ. Verses 5 and 6 is where we are going to focus today, it takes us to the two juxtapositions for what we can set our minds on. We can set our minds on the flesh, that is one way to go, or set it on the Spirit.

Paul takes the back door approach in order to discern whether we set our minds on the flesh or on the Spirit. He says in verse 5 for those who live according to the flesh. So if you are wondering whether you are a sheep or a goat ask the question, how am I living? What type of fruit am I producing? Does discord, and argument, and disagreement always seem to follow me? Then maybe you have your mind set on the flesh. Does my body seem to have the upper hand in my decision making? It is flesh. Is my life one pursuit of pleasure after another with no slowing down for the ones that I truly love and who love me? It is flesh. But we aren't always the best judges on what we are setting our minds on because it is not always clear.

Paul in Galatians 5:22 clears it up for us just in case we were wondering if we set our minds on the Spirit or on the flesh. He states that if our life is marked by and if it produces: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, then we are setting our minds on Christ. Today we must ask the question what we are thinking about? What have you set your minds on and what seems to be the pervading thought.

Paul ends in verse 6 by stating that if we set our minds on the flesh it will produce only death. But if we set our minds on the Spirit of Christ then that will lead to life and peace. Again, this is just like what we heard in Hosea when we are able to go through

life with our minds on Christ day in and day out, then it will produce life and peace, and isn't that what we all strive for?

Earlier in Romans in chapter 5:5 we read that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that he has given us.

The one whose dominant interests center in physical appetites finds that their whole existence is organized around their satisfaction. In the same way the one whose life is under the control of the Spirit finds that their conscious interests lie more and more in spiritual things.

What are your dominant interests, now that football season is just about to begin. What do we set our minds on, and what type of fruit does it produce. Paul answers us that if we set our minds on Christ we will lie down in safety and we will discover life and peace, that's what I'm shooting for. Amen.