

“Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind”

Date: January 19, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Theme: Transformation, Growth

Occasion: Intentional Faith Development, series

On a bitterly cold morning in Erie Pennsylvania, a husband and wife were watching the news during breakfast. They heard the weather announcer say “We are going to have 8 to 10 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the *even*-numbered side of the street, so the snow plows can get through.”

So, the good wife went out and moved the car.

A week later while they were eating breakfast again, the weather forecaster said, “We are expecting 10 to 12 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the *odd*-numbered side of the street, so the snow plows can get through.”

The good wife went out and moved her car again.

The next week they were having breakfast and the weather forecaster said, “We are expecting 12 to 14 inches of snow today, you must park...” And just then the power went out.

The good wife was very upset, and with a worried look on her face said, “I don’t know what to do. Which side of the street do I need to park on so the snow plows can get through?”

Then, with love and understanding in his voice, the husband replied, “Why don’t you just leave it in the garage this time?” (Didn’t see that one coming did you?)

Last Sunday we celebrated five baptisms here at Lakewood, as we remembered Jesus’ own baptism in the Jordan River. I told the parents that the water is not magical; it doesn’t automatically make people saints. Their

children will need to be taught the Christian faith, and nurtured in the ways of Jesus. And I told the congregation that they too needed to continue to nurture their faith, so that they could grow in their walk with the Lord.

Immediately after Jesus' baptism he went out into the wilderness for 40 days, where he was tested by the Evil One. That was an intense 40 days of preparation for his ministry. Even the Lord Jesus underwent a period of preparation and training, getting ever close to the Father. If Jesus himself had to do this kind of preparation, just think how much more we need it.

Beginning last week and continuing this week and next, I want to share with you some thoughts about Intentional Faith Development. One of the last things Jesus told his disciples, according to Matthew's Gospel, was that they were to go and make disciples in all the nations of the world.

That's the *primary* mission of the United Methodist Church – “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Friends, we have to be intentional about that, and not leave it to chance. We need to be deliberate in our disciple-making; and intentional when it comes to our own spiritual formation. We can't leave it to chance; we must be intentional.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul compares this intentional faith development to an athlete training for a competitive race. He says that everyone who competes in an athletic event goes into training in order to win a crown, but we go into spiritual training to win a crown that will last forever. (1 Corinthians 9:25) Amen?

Throughout Christian history, followers of Jesus have engaged in certain spiritual disciplines that allow God to shape and mold us in God's image. It is no different today. You and I need to be in training to be faithful followers of Jesus. As we practice the spiritual disciplines, God deepens

our love for God and for our neighbor. God transforms us, but we need to do the work, the training, the discipline.

When we join the United Methodist Church and take membership vows, we profess faith in Jesus Christ, affirm membership in the church universal, assert loyalty to the United Methodist Church AND we vow to support our local congregation through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness. We made a promise when we joined.

These vows that we took when we became professing members of the United Methodist Church contain seven of the essential practices of discipleship, which are the means by which God will transform and renew our minds. They are prayer, meditating upon the Scriptures, corporate worship, small-group community, financial generosity and invitational evangelism.

Here we are at the beginning of a new year, and it is a good time to look back and evaluate how we have done with our spiritual disciplines. Without practice, we won't grow and become the Christians God wants us to be. We'll remain this year the same person we were last year. But Paul tells us in our second lesson today, that we are to be transformed.

Friends, we all begin in different places and we don't have to be experts in any of the spiritual practices. But each of us must continue to move deeper into each practice so that our relationship with God is deepened and strengthened. We are transformed by the renewal of our minds. And we renew our minds, regularly, by practicing the disciplines.

How's it going for you? Are you a part of one of our Bible studies here at Lakewood, or elsewhere? Are you reading any Christian authors who have helped you to grow in your faith? Are you a part of a prayer group,

practicing the discipline of praying out loud together? You won't ever get any better than you are right now, if you don't practice.

Are you spending any time in personal prayer and meditation? What's the best time of day for you to do it? Mine is early in the morning before I leave the house. Others like to do it in the evening and review the day. Which spiritual discipline do you practice most often? Is there one I mentioned that needs more of your attention than others?

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds. We are told to have the mind of Christ. How do we get that? How do we begin to allow our thoughts to be more like Jesus? It is by practicing the spiritual disciplines. It doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen by chance. We need to practice the disciplines which allow the Holy Spirit to do its work in our life.

You know, someone once said that the local church is like a football game. There are 50,000 people in the stands who need to get some exercise and 22 people on the field who need a little rest. Unfortunately, for many people Christianity is a spectator sport.

They expect church leaders to do the ministry and they like to sit back and watch them do their thing. They're content to just come to church and sit in the pew and watch what's going on up front. They judge the quality of the service by whether or not they were entertained that morning. Their understanding of Christianity is simply that of a spectator.

That understanding of the Church is quite foreign to the New Testament, where we find numerous examples of growing, involved, passionate Christians intentionally working out their faith in acts of prayer, Bible study, small group ministry, generous giving and active service.

Are you a spectator Christian? Are you willing to jump onto the field and play? Are you ready to get into the game? Be transformed, by the renewing of your minds, through the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

May God bless each of you as you seek a closer walk with Him.
Amen.

This sermon borrows from the book "*A Disciple's Path*," by James Harnish and Justin Larosa; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012, pp. 27, 31.