



Saint John United Methodist Church
12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059
stjohnky.com

Message for September 19, 2021
“unhurried: Change Like Christ”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

ACT

We have been talking the past few weeks about what it means to be a disciple. We honed-in on that last week and do so again today. Last week, if you remember, we shared that discipleship has everything to do with abiding in Christ. Today, we talk about being changed by Christ. And to tip our hand about next week, we will be talking about taking action for Christ.

That makes an easily remembered acronym using the letters, ACT.

- **Abiding in Christ**
- **Changed by Christ**
- **Taking action for Christ**

Change

Change is by no means easy, yet necessary in every way. Change is one of the constants of life. We are forever having to adapt and change. We have had to do that like crazy during the pandemic.

Let's hear these notable quotes when it comes to change:

“Great things never come from your comfort zone.”

All of us would much rather live life from our comfort zones. Change has a way of taking us out of them.

Rick Godwin, Pastor of Summit Christian Center in San Antonio has this to say about change, *“One reason people resist change is because they focus on what they have, instead of what they have to gain.”*

We would much rather hold on than to venture out into the unknown.

Max Lucado puts it well about such things when he says, *“You change your life by changing your heart.”*

True change never happens unless the heart is involved. The Christian faith is all about change. We call it *“new life in Christ.”*

Paul writes about such things in II Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul talks about the sort of change that comes when we resolutely give ourselves to Christ. He talks about change in terms of “*transformation*.” His is a wonderful statement that speaks to what it means to be a disciple. Let’s hear then Romans 12:1-2.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Total Commitment

I like the story told of the chicken and the pig who were considering opening a restaurant together. The chicken said to the pig, “We can offer the best breakfast in town. I’ll provide the eggs and you’ll provide the bacon.”

The pig thought about it for a moment and said, “I don’t think so. For you that represents an offering. For me, it’s a total commitment.”

Being a disciple means being totally committed. There really isn’t any halfway when it comes to discipleship. In talking about such things, Paul uses the image of a sacrifice. In the Old Testament there really was no such thing as a partial sacrifice. You were either all in or you were not.

Abraham was all in when it came to offering his son. Of course, as we know, God provided a lamb for that sacrifice.

In the New Testament, the Rich Young Ruler upon asking Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life was told by Jesus to go and sell everything he had. “*Then come, follow me,*” said Jesus.

As we know, the young man walked away sorrowfully, not willing to commit.

“I urge you,” writes Paul, *“in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”*

Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of the Bible has Paul saying this, “*So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.* Romans 12:1 *The Message*

In offering our bodies as a “*living sacrifice*.”

- We present ourselves to God.
- We submit ourselves to his way and will.
- We seek to do his bidding instead of our own.

By so doing, we will find ourselves following God’s will more and more.

Pastor and author, James Merritt talks about “*presentation before revelation*.”

As we present ourselves to God in the way Paul talks about in Romans 12, we will hear from God more and more. We will be attuned to who he wants us to be and what he wants us to do.

What Not to Do

In helping us along to that end, Paul is quick to share what **not** to do. He says, “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world.*”

When it comes to the influence of the world, we are up against it all the time. We are bombarded by the media, influenced by friends, and swayed by things that go on at work. From our earliest days on this earth peer pressure has had a profound effect.

It is tough keeping a sense of our own identity, much less our identity in Christ. It is never comfortable standing out, cutting against the grain, or heading in a different direction than the rest.

During the pandemic we have heard a lot about “*herd immunity.*” For our purposes today, let’s turn that phrase a bit and consider “*herd mentality*” and its sway upon the way we live our lives. It is all too easy to do what everyone else is doing. “*Going with the flow*” is easy to do and tough to overcome.

That’s why it is so important for us to come together regularly to encourage one another about the fact that it’s okay to be different.

We all know about the chameleon. The chameleon changes colors based on its circumstance. It’s a survival mechanism. We were not created simply to survive. We were created to live and live abundantly.

Christ himself said, “*I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.*” (John 10:10)

What to Do Then?

If “*conforming to the pattern of this world*” is what we are **not** to do, then what is it we **need** to do? We need to open ourselves to being transformed. We need to let God do his thing.

It comes to us to be pliable. God is the potter, and we are the clay. In his hands, he can create something really beautiful.

When it comes to God transforming our lives, Paul talks about “*the renewing of our minds.*” What our minds are stayed on goes a long way toward influencing our lives. Paul put a lot of stock in the power of the mind to have sway over life—for good and for bad.

He writes in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about these things.*” Thinking about such things can’t help but bring about positive change in our lives.

What we are really talking about here today is a matter of the heart. The question comes: “*In view of God’s mercy,*” will we be open to the love of God in Jesus Christ to the place where our hearts become not only open to him, but soft toward others?

What better time than now to have our hearts open to God? What better time to relate to others with a heart that is soft and full of love? This is such a divisive, fractious time.

As we relate to others, we’d do well to consider the needs of others, to put ourselves in their shoes, and consider the things they may be facing.

That sort of thing will bring peace to every situation and will help spread God's love to all who are around us.

When it comes to transformation, the image of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon comes to mind. The caterpillar spins the cocoon and when the time is right emerges more beautiful than ever before.

Change comes from the inside out.

A Couple of Prayers

I love this prayer. It has everything to do with what we are talking about today. It is intended to be prayed at the beginning of each day, even before you get out of bed.

"Lord, this bed is my altar. This body is my sacrifice. As I arise to face this day, until the moment I return, I offer my life as a sacrifice to you."

I also like this prayer. It is a part of the Wesley Covenant Service. It is often prayed at midnight as one year ends and another begins.

It is a prayer of deep commitment to God's will, his *"good, pleasing, and perfect will."* It's an *"all in"* sort of prayer.

"Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal."

Both these prayers put us closer to the place of presenting ourselves as *"living sacrifices,"* ready to live out the life of a disciple *"changed by Christ."*