

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
April 30/May 1, 2016
Carrie Gleeson
Commitment Class Weekend
Romans 12:1-8

When I was little my favorite question to ask was, “Why?” I annoyed my parents to death. My parents would speak and I would say, “Why?” I could literally have thirty minute conversations with my parents. I don’t know why they kept it going or didn’t shut me up, but I consistently said *why, why, why?* And then when I became a teenager, it turned to *so?* They loved that. *So what?* It can be a scary question, but I continually reminded them as I was annoying them that asking *so what* was a good thing because it meant that I was curious; I was inquisitive. I wanted to know things. The passage we’re going to look at this morning is a *so what?* passage—so what bit of difference does it make? We’re going to look at the book of Romans. Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome and for the first 11 verses he talks about what it looks like to live a Christian life. What does faith mean? What does believing in Jesus mean? There is a ton of theology in the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans. And then in chapter 12, he turns a corner and he says *so what?* So what does it mean? What does all of this look like in your everyday life? I think Paul wants us to know two things by reading this passage. I think that he wants us to know that the Gospel causes internal transformation and that the Gospel causes relational transformation. I’m going to read Romans, verses 1-6 out of The Message.

¹⁻²So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, your eating, your going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God has for you is the best thing that you can do for Him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best in of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. ³I’m speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it’s important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what He has done for us, not by what we are and what we do for Him. ⁴⁻⁶In this way we are like the various parts of the human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of His body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off

toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts of Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pride fully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

The first verse of that chapter in the NIV translation reads, "In view of God's mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices." First, the Gospel causes internal transformation because of who God is in light of His mercy—in view of His mercy, because of His faithfulness, because of His love, of His compassion, of His forgiveness, of the fact that He went to the cross for us—in light of all these things, offer yourselves as living sacrifices. Coming into contact with the living God doesn't just elicit a Sunday or a Wednesday response. It's not half-hearted; it's not just one part of me. He says offer your *bodies* as a living sacrifice. I cannot offer just my arm to God. I love how Tim Keller put it. He said, "Paul is saying that God does not want a purely inward or abstract worship, but a practical and a total one." That's why he says to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. A living sacrifice means we are continually willing to offer ourselves to God, to grow in His likeness, to continually renew our obedience to Him.

As I look back over the course of my life, there are few times when that has been so distinct. The first time was when I was a student in Commitment Class. I went home one Wednesday night after hearing my leader talk about Christ's death on the cross and how it was a personal thing—that I could accept Christ's death on the cross was for me...not my parents, not my church leaders, it was for me; it was mine. And I went home that night and prayed that God would come into my life and that in turn, I would give my life to Him. Over the course of high school, that path wasn't always smooth. It was one step forward and about 18 steps back, one baby step forward and another 25 steps back. But God was working this out in my life because I had experienced him in a personal and intimate way and it needed to be mine. Then after I got to college, I joined a sorority and there was a very distinct clear choice for me living in this sorority. I could go one of two ways. I could choose to live how a stereotypical sorority girl would live or I could choose to pursue my faith. There was a choice for me to make because I had had this internal transformation, this internal experience.

Paul goes on and he adds lessons on to this. Okay, so what does this look like? How do we make this practical? "Don't conform to the patterns of this world." Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. The word for conform he uses is the same word they would use for pottery, for molding clay. Clay or Play-Doh, whatever we do now, is very formable. It's easily molded. So what are you forming to? What do you conform to? Even the most independent around us conforms to something. Paul says that there's a different way to live because when we're living as a living sacrifice to the almighty and loving God, there's another option. And sometimes that other option means making a very clear, concise, and distinctive choice in our lives.

During my first week of college, there was a fraternity party on the first Tuesday night. All the upper classmen in the house were like, “Freshmen, are you going to come? Why don’t you all come? Meet us at the house and we’ll go together.” And all of the girls in my pledge class were going, so I said, “Okay, great, let’s go.” And as I walked into my sorority house, another upper classman was coming down the stairs and she looked at me with this big smile on her face and said, “Carrie, are you here to go to the campus ministry group with us tonight?” And I was like . . . “Yes. Yes, that would probably be a better choice than the alternative of going to the fraternity party.” And I can tell you, that night changed the course of my college life. The first Tuesday of school changed the course of my life because that night I decided to go to that college ministry gathering. I met my Bible study leaders that night, and they didn’t let me out of their sight for the next three-and-a-half years. I met other Christians, and I got involved. Sometimes it means making a very distinct choice.

Paul continues on and says, “Readily recognize what He wants from you, quickly respond to it. Renew your mind.” He starts with the renewing of your mind. Living sacrificially is a continual process of renewing our mind and it made me think, *okay, well why does he start with the mind? What’s so important about the mind?* Well, the mind is the control center of our lives. The mind can go any which way we want it to. So of course, the renewing process of learning what it means to become a continual living sacrifice, living into our transformation and our encounter with Jesus, would start in our minds.

If you stop to think about what fills you up, about what influences you, what comes into your mind on a daily basis? I will be the first person to admit that it’s not always Godly. It isn’t always good, and it doesn’t always point me to Jesus. I took a little inventory . . . I wake up to the radio, to whatever song or person is talking. I have breakfast and watch the news—and we all know how political rhetoric is these days— so that comes to mind. Then I *do* spend some time in Scripture, so that comes into my mind. As I get ready for the day, sometimes I listen to a Christian podcast and sometimes I’ll play music and sometimes I have just my thoughts. When I get into my car and go to work, I listen to whatever is on, whatever music is on in my car. At work I have meetings and I talk with my staff and we plan out our day and our week. I check out my social media, I respond to text messages, I interact with my friends, I go home, I watch Netflix . . . those are the things that influence me on a daily basis. What influences you? What voices are speaking to you on a daily basis and what does it look like for you to renew your mind spiritually so that we center our minds on Christ? I don’t believe we can do that without the word of God; the word of God is transformative in and of itself, so part of renewing our minds means reading the word of God.

Paul goes on and he says: “For by the grace given to me, do not think of yourselves as more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith that God has given you.” We *need* to think of ourselves and

we *should* think of ourselves. Not more highly than we are, and not more lowly than we are, because the purpose of being with each other is to live this thing out...live this faith out with each other in the church. And because of that, we continually live as a sacrifice together. We don't do it alone. We don't walk alone, we don't talk alone, we live life together. So it means that I need to know what my gifts are and what I bring to the table. And you need to know what gifts you have because they're all going to work together as a function of the body of Christ. If I come to the table and say, "Well guys, I've got every gift, what do you need me to do?" that's not going to serve the body of Christ. Until we get a right view of ourselves, we won't have a right view of others. Central to community in Christ is the understanding of who we are, what we've been gifted with, and what we haven't been gifted with, because then we rely on each other and we're able to serve each other.

The next two verses in this chapter in the NIV say,

⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. [Romans 12:4-5]

We have different gifts. The Gospel causes relational transformation. God is always, first and foremost, concerned with relationship...our relationship with Him and our relationships with each other. He is always going to be most concerned with relationship because faith is not a checklist—it is not a behavior checklist, it's not about me, it's not about what I did. Faith is about my relationship with God and how that influences and serves the body of Christ—we need each other in this. Church is not for my consumption. It's not for my enjoyment or to make me feel good. I have gifts that I bring to the table that you need and you have gifts that I need. We do this together so that we can bring the kingdom of God to earth.

I didn't fully understand this until I got to college. I had experienced it somewhat when I was here because I had great Christian friends here, but I didn't go to Edina and I went back to my school and my suburb without having that many Christian friends. My friends at church and my friends at school were very, very different. So, when I finally got to college and experienced Christian community for the first time, it changed everything in me. My Bible study leaders who followed me around for three-and-a-half years encouraged me, challenged me, and called me out on so much, not because they were pointing a finger at me and saying, "You aren't doing this" or "You're doing this and you should stop", but because they knew that I wanted to live out Christ's likeness. They lovingly came alongside me and said, "Hey, Care, have you thought about this?" or "So what do you think about maybe allowing God into this part of your life?" I experienced Christian community and it was deep.

This entire passage from Romans comes back to relationships. The passage comes back to relationship and how we practically walk out our faith because the Gospel

causes internal transformation *and* it causes relational transformation. So how are you being molded? How are you being shaped? What does it look like for you to renew your mind and not conform to the patterns of this world? Where are there invitations from God in your life and opportunities to turn from one thing and go to another that embraces Him and that pursues Him more?

This is *your* so what? So what? You've spent the last year studying and learning and going on retreats. So what? What does that mean for you? What will that look like as you walk this forward? Let's pray.

God, thank You for being a God that pursues us. You're a God that calls us to live this faith life out with each other and it is not always easy, but I am so grateful that You give us the body of Christ. God, I pray that You would instill the deepness of Your love in us, and that we would have a powerful transformational experience. That we would internally be changed and that your influence on us would seep out into all of our relationships. God, thanks for being a God that speaks to us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.