

McCabe United Methodist Church

August 12, 2018

"Who Am I to Hinder God?"

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Good Morning Church!

We gather in the name and spirit of Jesus. Jesus humbled himself. He emptied himself. He became obedient even unto death on the cross. On the cross Jesus committed his Spirit fully and completely into God's hands. This same Spirit is alive and active and moving among us this morning.

Let's pray:

Holy and Mighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever changed you mind? ☺

Today I was going to wear my brown jacket but I picked the blue one instead.

Last night, I was going to have a burger and fries for supper but I had pizza and a salad instead.

We change our minds. Most of the time it's not a big deal.

But that's not really what Paul is talking about in this morning's Scripture. Paul is talking about a change of mind that is a big deal. He's talking about a change of mind that comes from a change of the heart.

A change of mind that comes from a change of heart...

The Apostle Paul is talking about churches and church people. He's talking about the way we can think and act. Paul challenges us saying: There are times we worry about ourselves and our own pet projects. There are times we're more concerned about ourselves than we are about harming the greater good. He continues: Don't look to your own interests first. When necessary, change your minds!

In Romans 12, it's the Apostle Paul again.

In the Message translation it's titled:

Place Your Life Before God.

The Apostle writes:

12 ¹⁻² 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. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing 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 God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the (world)... unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, **God brings the best out of you...**

Changing our minds and changing our hearts from the inside out.

Our Bishop writes that J.B was in prison. He was a leader of the white supremacist group Aryan Nation. He got convicted for murder and sent to prison. Yet even in prison J.B. stayed active. He coordinated and led illegal activities inside the walls of the prison, and beyond them too. J.B. led the beatings of people who were African-American or Muslim. He led in the number of knockdowns by prison guards. He led in the number of days spent in solitary confinement. His mind was filled with hatred and violence and dominance and intimidation and exploitation and self-gratification.

But then he changed his mind. But then he changed his heart.

Through the prison ministries and through exposure to a warden who was sold out for Jesus,

J.B. started to take on the mind of Christ.

J.B. started to empty himself.

J.B. started to look to others' needs before his own.

This was actually dangerous for J.B. Instead of identifying other people as targets, J.B. became the target because his Aryan Nation buddies felt betrayed. Little by little J.B. got involved with prison ministries. And with J.B.'s change of mind came a change of heart. J.B.'s change of mind and change of heart helped transform the prison from a violent, deadly place to a model correctional facility.

Changing minds and changing hearts.

We're talking about Self-emptying.

We're talking about letting go of our dug in positions.

We're talking about taking a breath and stepping away from the battle and even letting down our guard.

Maybe we listen to God and to each other so much so that we begin to die to ourselves. Changing our minds and changing our hearts. It's not always easy. It can feel messy, and it can require going against some of our need for predictability and safety and security. Yet when we faithfully change our minds, we find a new freedom. We discover a new kind of peace. We are unbound and unburdened. We're able to live without fear.

In the early church Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus agreed on the mission of Jesus. There was unity when they were filled and guided by the Holy Spirit. The God movement we call the early church moved forward when Jesus' followers let the same mind be in them that was in Christ Jesus. Their minds were changing and their hearts were changing too.

This is our story as United Methodists. John Wesley, fueled by the Spirit, took this radical, unconventional, extravagant message of hope, mission, and care for the 'other'

outside the walls of the traditional church. This went against the church teaching of the time. And the Gospel spread across England. Through Wesley and his circuit riders, the Gospel Message was brought to the frontiers of the newly forming America.

Friends, we are people grounded in changing our minds if that's what is necessary to find new ways to be the church together. We are people grounded in growing and changing hearts that find new ways to bring mercy and grace.

Friends we are people of hope and healing and new life and resurrection, however and wherever people might need it!

In our second reading this morning from the Book of Acts, chapter 11, Peter talks about his vision in Joppa. Peter's vision challenged so much about what Peter was taught as a Jewish person. Peter's vision challenged so much of what he thought was right and necessary to love God and neighbor.

Yet Peter listened, and changed his mind. In the process Peter's heart was changed. It changed Peter, and it changed the world. After the vision Peter baptized and even ate with the uncircumcised Gentiles.

The early believers called Peter on the carpet for it. His religious friends complained and pointed fingers. They condemned Peter for ruining their good name. After all, they were Jews and the Gentiles surely weren't the Chosen Ones.

Our bishop writes that today we can be more sophisticated about it. We can be more savvy about it in the questions we ask and in the statements we make, but our messages, at times, can be the same as those of the early Jewish challengers.

- Sometimes our messages can be divisive instead of unifying.

- Sometimes our messages are couched in care and concern, but their intent is actually rooted in hard hearted disdain for the one we see as different than us.

- Sometimes our minds and our hearts need changing.

Peter went to the believers who were condemning him. Peter said: You know what: the 'outsiders,' the 'other,' the Holy Spirit came upon them just like us. He cites Jesus saying: John baptized with water; you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit, and then Peter asked: If God gave them the same gifts that God gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, ***Then who was I to hinder God?***

Then who was I to hinder God?

Friends: Maybe that's the question to us, isn't it? That's a haunting question...

Who am I to hinder God?

This is the question we have to wrestle with.

Is what we're doing?

Is what we're saying?

Is how we're behaving?

Is it helping, or is it hindering God?

And if the answer is that we're hindering God's work, if the answer is that we're hindering the breakthrough of the Holy Spirit, then it's time to examine our heads and our hearts...

Who am I, that I might hinder God?

Who are we that we might hinder God?

Friends, here this morning, the challenge to us is to take those next steps in emptying ourselves.

Let's empty ourselves of the need to control each other.

Let's empty ourselves of the need to try to control God.

Let's empty ourselves of the fear of each other and of the fear of the future and the fear of the unknown.

Sometimes we have to step out in faith.

Sometimes we have to change our minds.

Sometimes our hearts need changing too..

As we worship this morning, let's empty ourselves and ask: Who am I? Who am I to hinder God?

Let's pray:

God, Who am I? Who am I as your servant? Mighty Lord, open our eyes and our minds to help us see. Reveal to us how and where we might need to change our minds. Touch our hearts in areas our hearts need changing too. The last thing we ever want to do is to hinder you and your mission. And so we pray in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.