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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 13, 2020  
15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 15:15-21, Matthew 16:21-26

Hymns: 224; 421; 409; 413:5, 6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 12:1-8

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

<sup>3</sup> For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup> Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them:* if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

### INTRO: Metamorphosis

That is a key word in our text this morning. I know you didn't hear me read it. I read "transformed," but the Greek was metamorphosis. We know that to be a word describing an extreme transformation of both form and life. We identify it most commonly with caterpillars changing into butterflies, like we have represented on our bulletin cover this morning. Sometimes we think of fuzzy cute little caterpillars that make a cocoon or chrysalis and come out as the butterfly that we all think is beautiful to behold. That's true enough, but you know sometimes the worm at the beginning isn't so cute and fuzzy and harmless. This summer we found what I called from childhood a tomato worm. Actually, we found two of them out in the garden, one a tomato plant and the other on one of the potato plants. They were huge, fat, green, ugly worms devouring the plants they were on at an alarming rate. In less than a day the worms had eaten several large leaves of each plant. They were gross to look at. We did a little research, too late to save the worm's life I'm afraid, and we discovered that these huge, ugly, destructive green monsters turned into one of the most fascinating moths, commonly called the hummingbird moth. Have you ever seen one? They show up at dusk. It is remarkable how much like a hummingbird these moths are. Their wings go with lightning speed and they can fly backwards and forwards or remain in one place. They have long tongues that reach deep into flowers, but they are moths with the little antennae, and they are wonderful beneficial pollinators. What a transformation from ugly, destructive, worms into flying, beneficial pollinators. Transformation in form and function, from destructive to beneficial.

That is the power of the metamorphosis that lies at the heart of our text this morning. The Holy Spirit would lead us to grasp what this means for us as children of God, that we might be found --

### **THEME: Living Transformed by Christ.**

Acknowledging that a real change comes into the life of every child of God, let us hear of --

#### **I. The Power of this Transformation.**

Paul reveals this power to us in the opening verse of our text.

**Romans 12:1** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*”

If you're not careful you might read this verse and miss the source of power Paul speaks of. Did you catch it?

When we want people to change, we often begin with scolding and punishment! That is the way of the world, and it is pretty well established that this may produce a bit of a change in behavior, but it will not produce a true metamorphosis, a true transformation. However this remains a part of our human nature, and behavior. We scold. Even as a pastor I find myself getting frustrated and wanting to scold. There is a time and a place for scolding and words of condemnation, but we must realize their limitations. Commands such as “You must do better!” or “You should know better and behave accordingly!” don't always bring the desired result. Indeed they can't because they don't contain the power to enact a real and total transformation of form and function, or behavior.

Now consider Paul's words to the Romans. He begins with “I beseech you,” or “I urge you, brothers.” Paul encourages with a term of endearment, and then focuses on the source of power “**by the mercies of God**” Up to this point in the Epistle to the Romans Paul has been presenting the wonder of the mercies of God as they are revealed to a lost and sinful mankind. He presented the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior as “the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16) That theme statement from Romans one states it clearly. The gospel of Christ is the **power of God** unto salvation. The mercies of God are found in the wonder of God looking down upon this world of rebellious sinners among whom the Lord found none who do good, not even ONE! (Psalm 14:3) Knowing that these sinners stand condemned to an eternity of hell fire, the Lord had compassion upon the world. He loved the world and sent His only begotten Son into this world to take our place under the rod of God's wrath and condemnation. God directed the course of human history toward this event that

took place Jerusalem, where Jesus in love and with fierce determination went forward to suffer and die for us and our salvation.

God sent this message of grace and life out into the world that through this gospel He might call sinners to repentance and life and transformation.

Now let's get personal. Hear Paul's words for yourself, as written directly to you. Through Paul the Holy Spirit urges you to present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God. How and why? In view of the *mercies of God* that have come to *you*. Jesus died **for you!** God revealed this truth of His love and forgiveness to **YOU!** God called **YOU** by the gospel. God worked a mighty transformation within you, a metamorphosis of both form and function, changing you from a destructive, ugly, gross worm into a new beautiful creature in form and function.

“Alas and did my Savior bleed and did my Sov'reign die? Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I?”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 154:1)

Yes, He did, and you have been --

## **II. Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind.**

Consider the transformation that God works through the gospel.

**Romans 12:1B-2** “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Jesus paid for our sins. *We are bought and paid for.* We have been **redeemed.** This is a good thing. Jesus saved your life, both body and soul. In the transformation that accompanies this conversion we are made new creatures. The old has passed away. The butterfly doesn't return to being a caterpillar. So also the Christian is not to return to evil. But you know from your personal experience that this is not quite so simple. While we are in this life we still have fleshly desires and lusts. We still think selfishly. We still get angry and even hold grudges. We still think evil of our

neighbor, and speak and regretfully sometimes act out evil towards our neighbor. So the Spirit encourages, urges, beseeches us to live as the transformed children of God He has made us to be.

This involves repentance. Daily contrition and repentance. We confess our sins. We feel bad about sinning, not proud, not flippant as the world does. We put down the voice within us that demands to be heard; that voice saying, “It is **MY** life and I will do as I please” perhaps with a couple of expletives thrown in for good measure. We are not in this life to be true to self, but rather to be true to Christ, for we “*are not our own, we were bought at a price therefore we should glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits which are God’s!*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Even spelling it out in such broad generalities we will hear objections, “I can do what **I** want to do when **I** want to do it!”

That’s the old Adam again. That is old thinking. Repentance means to change your way of thinking. That is literally what it means, to change your thinking about sin and its guilt, and how one is to overcome sin and be rid of sin. This requires that idea of transformation again. Paul says that we are to be **transformed by the renewing of our minds**. The Holy Spirit changes our way of thinking. The Holy Spirit leads us into pure desires. It is by the power of the Spirit that we are not conformed to this world. Sanctified Christian living is a matter of growth in faith and life. It takes some careful thinking and discernment so that we embrace what is good and reject what is evil.

In this world a lot of what is good and a lot of what is evil can be all tangled up. We are to hate sin, but we are to love the sinner, even as Christ loved us. We look at the beauty of God’s creation and the wonders He has made but reject man’s philosophy that ridicules the truth of creation and a young earth. We see the many fine works of art, and inventions that enrich our lives as blessings that God has brought to us through the world. They are not evil in themselves, but many of these same technologies can be used to entice us to pride, evil, and lust. So as we strive to not be conformed to this world with its false morality that brings destruction and to be transformed by the renewing our minds we need to seek the Lord’s guidance by searching the Scriptures, and by praying diligently that Lord would lead us through this life.

Remember always that our lives are to be a living thank offering for all the Lord has done for us in His merciful goodness.

Remember we are transformed in form and function. As children of God, as Christ believers, we have a very important function in this world. That function is to openly demonstrate in our lives that God's will is right and good. If the world can't see a difference, or if the devil can trip us up that we fall into scandalous sin that besmirches that name we carry, the name of Christ, then the devil has won a victory in our lives. That happens. So we repent and begin again! We are to show the world that sin is evil, and the sins of our society are not part of our lives. We are to show the world that the love of Christ overcomes sin. "The proof is in the pudding," and **we are the pudding!**

This leads us to --

### **III. Transformation Activation.**

**Romans 12:3-8** "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup>For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup>Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup>or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Paul is specifically calling for the children of God to humbly consider what gifts they have and how they might use them for the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. We are all part of the body of Christ. Christ has given us different gifts and abilities. Since the Lord has given me certain gifts to preach and teach, I'm functioning as your called pastor. That does not make me superior to someone who has been given the gift of service and so fixes things at church and mows the lawn. A different part of the body of Christ has a different function but remains a part of the body of Christ. Some are placed in the body to give financial support to the

church as well as those in need. The Lord desires that this be done generously. Some are leaders, and they should lead with respect and kindness for others. Others teach our children. Some possess the gift of compassion, and so help those who are struggling in this life. The Lord desires that this also be done cheerfully.

These are all manifestations of the transformation in form and function worked by the Holy Spirit. All are necessary for the Church to function. What purpose is a bee or a moth that refuses to pollinate? There would be massive crop failure as well as the bees or moths depriving themselves of needed blessings. And yet we see this neglect of function in the kingdom of God, and it hurts the body, and it deprives the individual members of needed spiritual blessings.

So, we come back to the purpose of the transformation. In our gospel lesson Jesus talked about the sacrifice He was going to make in Jerusalem, a sacrifice that was necessary for us, not for Him. It was necessary for **our** salvation. **Jesus denied Himself for our salvation.** Then Jesus said if we would come after Him we also ought to deny ourselves. AS transformed children of God we live for Him, and for our fellow man, NOT to fulfill our every whim and to get the most fun and toys in this life. This will involve sacrifice, sacrifice freely offered in loving gratitude for the mercy and grace God has showered upon us. It will also involve tribulation and hardship. This is only possible in view of the mercies of God and what the Holy Spirit has done within us. This will be how we thank and praise the Lord. This is our reasonable **worship**. That worship starts here, and continues through the week, throughout our lives.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (v.2)

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)