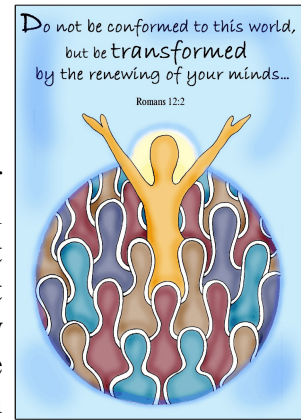


**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Church Picnic Service and Opening Service for the 50th anniversary**

Text: Romans 12:1-8 (NIV)

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer 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. ³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.



Theme: Christians Are from a Different Mold.

From the perspective of today's world, everything is about "me" and why I want. The world has been that way since the fall into sin, but it has probably never been as blatant as it is today. There is a network called "MeTv." There is a radio station which calls itself, "My957." One of the television stations has a website called "Myfoxmilwaukee.com." It's amazing how many websites begin with "My." We have "ipods" and "iphones." The latest one that I've seen is a pizza called, "Pizza Mia," which is apparently Italian for "my pizza." When I pointed that out, my family said, "Well why would you order a pizza with things that someone else wants. Look around and you will find that "I," "My," and "Me" are all around us today.

The mold that shapes the world is to makes things go the way that we want them to be. As Christians, however, we come from a different mold in which we offer our bodies as living sacrifices that God's will is done.

I. We live in a very individualistic age.

We see that in many ways, but here are two, which are common today.

Right and wrong are what we want them to be. We often say that God loves us just the way that we are. He does love us the way we are, whether we are poor or rich, whether we are athletic or not, or no matter what race we are. However, we often change this to mean that I can do whatever I want and God should still love me the way that I am. We often change our freedom from sin into a freedom to sin. What directs our lives are not the 10 commandments, but what makes us happy. Morality becomes about me and what I want. It has nothing to do with God's Word and will.

It also shows itself in our relationships with other people. 50 years ago, Americans were joiners. They joined all kinds of things. Lodges (which we don't approve of) were strong and quite powerful. There were many boy and girl scout troops. There were many strong ethnic and other clubs. There were bowling leagues throughout the city. Churches grew rapidly with new members. Almost everyone was a member of a church. That has changed in recent years. Many lodges have closed. A lot of boy and girl scout camps have been sold. A lot of clubs have gone out of business. We have far fewer bowling alleys today than 20 years ago. Church membership has also been steadily declining in the last number of years. There are many people who consider themselves Christians who are not members of a church. Even when many people join a church, it is based on what they like rather than on whether the teaching is based on God's word and centered on the Gospel. One thing that often frustrates pastors today is that people want the services of the church without membership. Pastors get calls about doing weddings when the couple has no desire to join the church. What is most difficult is when I get a call to do a funeral for someone who has had no contact with a pastor or church for decades. Sometimes the thought is there that the church should be there for me when I want to use it, but I don't want to be a part of it. That also happens with charity. When people come for help, my standard question is to ask whether they have a church. When they answer that they don't, I tell them that it is important to find a Christian fellowship. I'm more than happy to help the members of our fellowship, but very reluctant to help those who don't want to join anyplace but use the church only when they think that they need it. Our lack of commitment to others shows how everything revolves around me.

That is the mold of the world. It's "Me first."

II. As Christians, however, we are a part of a fellowship. We are one body in Christ.

Jesus Himself is the head of this fellowship. He gave up everything for us. When God saw our sinful condition, His first thought was how He could save us from our sin. His will was to save us. He loved us so much that He sent His only Son as our Savior. Jesus loved us so much that He suffered an agonizing death on the cross to save us from our sins. As the head Christ came not to be served but to serve and to give His life in order to save us all. In Ephesians 5 when Paul writes that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, this is how describes Christ's headship, "*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and presented her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.*" Christ's headship means that He gave up everything for us.

So Paul writes in verse 1, "*In view of God's mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God....Do not conform any longer to the world.*" As Christians we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who redeemed us. His will is our will. We don't want to lead the way. We want to follow Christ, no matter where He leads us. Sometimes He leads us places where we would rather not go. Our crosses can get very heavy, but we follow Him because we know that He is the way, the truth, and the life. His will is always best. In verse 2 Paul writes, "*Do not conform any longer 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.*" As Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, we also pray, "*Not my will, but Thine be done.*" Christ is our head, who gave up everything for us. We trust in that salvation and offer Him everything in view of His great mercy.

Together we form the body of Christ. We have all been given different gifts. God's Spirit has made every one of us unique. Paul lists several of His gifts here, such as prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, generosity, leadership or mercy. But there are many other gifts that God gives to His people. Some might have the gifts of finances. (You wouldn't want me to do the church accounting!) Others have been given the gift of music. God gives others the gift of artistry, such as my wonderful drawings in confirmation. Some have the gifts of technology. Others have been gifted in sports. Some know a lot about building or doing repairs. We are all unique individuals with different gifts, but Paul urges us not to think of ourselves higher than we ought to. He also warns against pride in his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Every person and every gift is important. None is more important than another. The gifts that we have are from God Himself. No one can say that he is more important or less important than someone else.

God's will is that we use those gifts for the common good. Paul writes that individually we are members of one another. The eye cannot function by itself. It needs the hands to pick things up, and the feet to walk to where it wants to go. In the same way, we need each other as Christians. We need the gifts that we can offer each other. We do not live to honor ourselves, but to serve each other as Christ has served us. When we see a brother or sister in Christ in need, we lend our aid. When we see someone going astray, we exhort one another. We have Sunday School teachers, custodians, and people on boards. All those things are important. But what is most important is what we do privately and quietly to support each other. Pastors often complain about people that they call "Pew Sitters." They are people who come to church, but don't take part in too many activities. However, I've known many of those quiet Christians who encourage people who are down, who pray earnestly for those in need, and who do many other quiet acts of service. As Christians we serve each other. We support each other in mercy as Christ has loved us.

We are cut from a different mold than the world. Our motivation is not my will, but God's will. In view of God's mercy, we desire that His will is done in our lives, and we work to love and support each other in Christ. That is the basis of our anniversary theme, "United in Christ." We are not a bunch of individuals pushing our own dreams and desires. We are one in Christ, who desire that God's will is done among us. Christ is our head and together we are the members of His body.

May God give us faith in His mercy, that together we will follow His will and love each other as He has loved us.

Amen.

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