

A NEW MINDSET

July 16, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Howard Chapman
First Presbyterian Church of Marion, Iowa
Text: Romans 8:1-11

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The Word of the Lord...

Thanks be to God!

SERMON

I don't know whether or not you have noticed but over the last few years there have been some substantial changes going on at one of our national institutions, something that has been symbolic of the United States throughout the world. I am referring, of course, to that American icon, McDonalds, the most successful of all fast food chains. For decades McDonalds has been synonymous with the American love for over indulgent, ultra-convenient meals with too much fat, salt, sugar and too many calories. This public image all came to a head in 2004 when Norman Spurlock produced a documentary film called *Supersize Me*. For a month, Spurlock ate nothing but McDonald's food, for breakfast, lunch and supper. When the person taking his order asked if he wanted to "supersize" his meal, he would say yes and eat it all. He then tracked his physical and emotional wellbeing over that time. Well, of course, this diet wreaked havoc on his health. He gained over twenty pounds, his cholesterol went through the roof, and he suffered from severe mood swings. Needless to say, McDonalds was not happy about this film, and insisted, perhaps rightly, that if you only ate the largest portions on the menu of any restaurant chain, day in and day out, you would have the same results. But it does seem that the company got the message and started to make some changes.

Within a few months after the film came out in 2004, McDonalds dropped the supersize option. Since then they have tried some other strategies, but over the last five years or so they have made some substantial changes. They have altered their Happy Meals with options like yogurt and fruit, rather than chicken nuggets and French fries. They have introduced salads and wraps, and are bragging about offering meals that are under 500 calories. They have provided drink options other than soda and milkshakes by expanding what they call their McCafe choices featuring a variety of coffee type drinks such as mochas and cappuccino. This year they have been selling their "signature crafted sandwiches" that allow customers to select various combinations to make their own unique sandwich. Not all these changes are necessarily any healthier, but they give you the feeling that you have much more choice and more control over what you are eating, and it is a shift away from old stereotypes of fast food restaurants.

It is called rebranding, an important part of free market capitalism. McDonalds wants to get away from the old image of mass produced, unhealthy, convenience-over-anything-else meals and shift to a new mindset of lots of choices, healthier options, and more specialized products. We shall see whether or not McDonalds is able to make this transition.

There are examples of successful rebranding. One of the best was Old Spice. This line of men's grooming products has been around for 80 years, long enough that it became associated with older men. Old Spice was the cologne your grandfather used. That all changed in February of 2010, when they introduced a commercial featuring a hunky actor named Isaiah Mustafa. Although it was an ad for men's cologne Mustafa was talking to women. He was cool and sophisticated, not breaking eye contact with the viewer as the scenes rapidly changed from one thing to another until finally he ended up sitting on a white horse. His message was, "Ladies, your man may not look like me, but he can smell like me." Which was the joke, of course, because it is television and you have no idea what he smells like. But it worked. There was a new mindset that men who wore Old Spice were not bald and paunchy, but handsome, cool and funny. Sales shot up, and other products like body wash and shampoo were introduced.

I mention all this, because when we study the Bible we see that God is often into rebranding; Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, Jacob becomes Israel, Simon becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul, and a ragtag bunch of fishermen become the "followers of the Way," but are called Christians by others. This rebranding is more than just a name change. It is a whole new way of thinking, a new perspective, a new mindset. Our scripture lesson for this morning is all about rebranding.

I will get into all this in just a moment, but first let me give you a little background. If you were here last week, Pastor Nancy preached on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It was written at the end of his life, while he was in prison awaiting trial. Our text is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. It was written much earlier in Paul's life and it is unique among the epistles, because it is addressed to a church not started by Paul. He had not even been to Rome. He was hoping to come and meet them, and also hoping that they would support his plans to take Christianity further west into regions of what is today France and Spain.

Today when someone in the Presbyterian Church wants to be ordained as a pastor and often when they are coming to serve in a new ministry, we ask them to provide a statement of faith. We want them to articulate what they believe, so we can understand how they think and how they will work. The letter to the Romans is the Apostle Paul's statement of faith. It is his longest letter, 16 chapters in all, and in it he systematically lays out his theology as to why he is now a disciple of Jesus Christ rather than a strict Jewish Pharisee. It is a complicated, heavy argument using classical Greek rhetoric, and employing technical terms and phrases. Paul talks about things like righteousness and justification and salvation and walking according to the flesh and living in the spirit and on and on. Down through the centuries scholars have had long drawn out debates on the nuances of all these various concepts.

However, one term Paul uses over and over again is the word "sin" or "sinner" or "sinfulness." He uses it over 40 times. In order to understand the basic line of Paul's argument in this letter it is important to realize what he means when he talks about sin. Paul was originally a Pharisee, one who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures in great detail. The original Hebrew word for "sin" actually was a term from archery. It is a word that means "missing the target, or not hitting what you are aiming for."

This concept goes all the way back to Genesis and the story of the fall of the first human beings. Do you remember what the Serpent said to Adam and Eve about eating the forbidden fruit? He said "When you eat it, you will be like God, knowing good from evil?" So what were they aiming for? They wanted to be like God. Did they hit their target? Not even close. They became guilty, embarrassed, vulnerable and pathetic. So sin is not just being naughty, or making mistakes, or being selfish and inconsiderate, or somehow slipping up and doing something you later regret. No, Paul sees sin as a powerful spiritual force that distorts and twists everything of God that is beautiful, holy, and good.

This morning when we baptized little Clay Lowe we talked about how there are forces that stand in the way to try to keep Clay from becoming all that he is meant to be. I said that “these forces subvert all human efforts for the good. They not only twist our actions, but our very intentions.” This is what Paul means when he talks about sin. It has entered the world and completely changed the way we think. It has distorted our perspective, and everyone has this flawed mindset. Earlier in the letter, in the third chapter, Paul states that everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, everyone is under the power of these forces. He writes, “All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” All have missed the target. No one has hit what they are aiming for.

But there is more bad news. In the fifth chapter of Romans Paul goes on to say that through sin, death has entered the world. By our distorted perspective that keeps us from hitting the mark we are cut off from life itself. This distortion has affected everything, even things that were meant to be good, such as the law of God. In just a few verses before our text for this morning he writes in 7:19, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”

What he is trying to say is that it is not that we do not know what the target is. God has revealed to us through the law given to Moses exactly what we need to aim at. We know what it means to be good and loving and kind, but it is beyond our ability to be that way. We know what we want to have happen, but we simply can't to it. Paul cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death.” He then gives an answer in 7:25, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

This all leads up to our scripture lesson for this morning. Paul opens the 8th chapter of Romans with some of the most comforting and liberating words of the whole Bible. “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death.” After describing this overwhelming struggle of trying to somehow be good enough and every time missing the mark, Paul now offers hope and reassurance. We can stop stressing out. There is no condemnation. We are not going to be punished. Death has no hold on us.

Now, just exactly how does that work? Well, we have been rebranded. I know it is perhaps something of a crass comparison, but let's go back to Old Spice for just a second. It was missing its target market. If that company had continued doing things the way they had been doing them, they probably would be going out of business. They wanted their products to be identified with young strong handsome men on beaches, not doddering old duffers in nursing homes. So they had to change. They had to see things differently. They had to have a new mindset. If they didn't, their business was going to die.

Essentially this is what Paul is saying has happened us. Through Jesus coming into the world, dying on the cross and then rising from the dead we have been rebranded. But this is more than just changing our name or our logo. Everything is now completely different. Our whole perspective is altered. We have a whole new way of thinking, an entirely new mindset. Paul says, “those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” Now we not only know what the target is, at last we can hit it. How do we do that? Well, we not only have been set free; we not only have a new mindset; we have also been empowered. In verse 9, Paul writes, “But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you,” then he goes on to say in verse 11, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to you...”

There is so much in this world today that seems to suck the life out of us. There is so much injustice, the rich getting richer while poverty grinds down those who have nothing. There is so much cruelty and abuse, and blatant self-centeredness and indifference to the suffering of others. There are all sorts of struggles in our lives, job loss, marriages failing, disease, pain and disappointment. It is difficult to know what we can count on, what will endure when difficulties overwhelm us. But the Spirit of God dwells within us. This Spirit is the force that raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit brings us life and peace. This Spirit enables us to be faithful and loving. This Spirit is what makes us righteous. It is what keeps us from sin and enables us to hit the target.

This power of the Spirit is at the heart of what we did this morning with little Clay Lowe. In our Presbyterian Christian tradition, the reason we baptize little ones is to openly admit that on our own we all are going to fall short and miss the mark. In our own strength, by our own power, the holiest person among us is no closer to hitting the target than little Clay. In comparison to the righteousness of God we are all babies. We all fall short of the glory of God. But our own power, our own holiness is not what we are counting on. Instead we are asking for the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead to dwell within Clay and to dwell within each one of us. That is what baptism is all about. It is a rebranding. It is a new mindset. A whole new perspective on life. By bringing Clay here to be baptized Cheyenne and Nick are saying the sooner the better, and they want us all to work together to help this to happen.

Now, I hope Cheyenne and Nick don't mind, but I took the liberty of copying some pictures off of their Facebook pages. They are a little fuzzy, but there they are with little Clay between them. So, who does Clay look like? Well, he certainly has his daddy's chin and smile, but I think he has his mommy's nose and eyes. Sometimes as a child grows someone will say, "He is the spittin' image of his daddy." Do you think Clay is the spittin' image of Nick? In some ways, yes, and as he gets bigger we shall see.

But here's the thing: Do you know where that expression "spittin' image" comes from? Fortunately, it has nothing to do with saliva, which if it did is actually rather gross and disgusting. No, the original expression was "spirit and image," as in "He is the spirit and image of his father." He is not just the image of his father. He does not just look like his father. He has his father's spirit, his father's nature, his father essence. Over time "spirit and image" was shortened to "spittin' image."

The book of Genesis says that we are made in the image of God, but unfortunately that is not enough. That will not enable us to hit the mark. We need to have the spirit and image of God. It is not just a matter of looking good. It is having a completely new mindset. It is having the Spirit of God, the nature of God, essence of God, within us. It is a complete rebranding. Paul says, "you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you..." In Christ Jesus we become the "spittin' image" of God, and that changes everything. That Spirit enters into us in our baptism and then when we claim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This Spirit is the same one who raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit shatters the power sin has over us. This Spirit takes away all that sucks the life out of us. This Spirit sets us free. There is no condemnation for those who are Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.