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“Love: Renewed Minds, Transformed Community”

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Romans 12:1-2, 9-16

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1. Introduction (title slide)

We are preparing for a journey, a journey we will embark upon together, both as individuals and as a congregation. Like any journey, we need to prepare – gathering supplies, organizing ourselves and our lives, studying the road map. But first, we need to know where we are going. We are moving toward becoming an intentionally anti-racist congregation, but becoming anti-racist is not the goal. The goal is love, the love God shares with us, the love we are to share with one another, the love by which we are known. We embark on this journey so we can become who God made us to be. *Love is the goal.* The first stop on our journey is a renewed mind and a community characterized by love.

2. Be Transformed

- a. The first step for us in this process is to offer ourselves to God which is our act of worship
 - i. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”
 1. “Bodies” might seem like an odd or awkward way of describing it, but what this is getting at is to offer your entire self, your whole person in worship
 2. Worship is not limited to one hour on Sunday mornings, but a way of life that brings honor and glory to God
 - ii. This offering/sacrifice described in 3 ways
 1. Living: an ongoing, daily offering
 2. Holy: dedicated and set apart for God
 3. Acceptable: this doesn’t imply getting by on the bare minimum, but worship that is pleasing to and focused on God
- b. Do not be conformed to this world
 - i. We are being called to a life that is different from the world’s standards
 1. World: pride, greed, gain, achievement, etc
 2. God: love, peace, kindness, self-control, humility, etc
 - ii. We should look, act, and think differently
 1. We are not supposed to be chameleon Christians and blend into the world around us. We have the hope, love, and truth of Christ which the world so desperately needs.
- c. So where do we start with this? By being transformed through the renewing of our minds
 - i. It always starts with us. The work of transformation and renewal starts within each individual first.
 - ii. This nonconformity to the world requires a transformation that is not achieved by our willpower but through the work of God renewing our mind and creating a new mentality
 - iii. When we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our mind, we can increasingly discern the will of God. We can know what God is about, what God wants us to do, we can know God’s heart.
 - iv. This renewal takes place through intentional time spent with God in prayer, scripture, or anything else that helps you grow in knowledge and love of God.
 - v. As our minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit, we develop the mind of Christ within us.

3. Having the Mind of Christ

- a. What a lofty goal, you might be thinking. Is that even possible, you might be wondering. But yes, it is possible!
- b. We can have the mind of Christ in the sense of doing what he did
 - i. A guide for this is in Philippians 2
 1. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but think of others before yourself
 2. Do not seek your own interests/good, but look to the interests of others and what is good for them
 3. Posture of humility and obedience
 - ii. The attitude that was in Christ, his thoughts, emotions, and values were what led him to give his life in love for others. We reveal the mind of Christ within us by the love we have for others.
- c. We can also have the mind of Christ in the sense of knowing what God thinks. This is possible because the Holy Spirit dwells within us and makes it known to us
 - i. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 "God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being. God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit."
 1. This passage in scripture closes out by saying "We have the mind of Christ." (2:16)
 2. As Christians, we have the privilege of knowing the wisdom of God. This doesn't mean we are going to know everything, but there are things that God shares with us.
 - ii. What exactly are these things God shares with us?
 1. God's will (as mentioned above)
 2. God's thoughts
 3. God's heart
- d. When we know God's heart, we will know love, especially the love God has for us.
 - i. Jeremiah 31:3 (CEB) "I have loved you with a love that lasts forever. And so, with unfailing love, I have drawn you to myself."
 - ii. God's love for us is unfailing, unstoppable, and nothing can separate us from it. There is nothing we can do to earn it and there is nothing we can do that will stop God from loving us.
 - iii. God's love is not something we hoard for ourselves. Because God loved us, we are called to love one another (1 John 4:11).
 - iv. We can love others because God loved us first (4:19)
 - v. As Christians we have the unique privilege and responsibility to make God's love known

4. Community Ethos= Love

- a. In this journey to intentionally becoming an anti-racist congregation, we are choosing love to be our defining characteristic. Love is our goal. The love we have received and experienced from God compels us to share that love with others.
- b. The second half of the Romans 12 passage includes a laundry list of commands and guidelines for living in community. We will not go into all of them in detail, unless you would like to be here until tomorrow.
 - i. Let love be genuine, sincere
 1. No ulterior motives, no eye on what you can gain
 2. A pure outgoing of the heart for others
 - ii. Hate evil
 1. This is an outworking of our baptismal vow to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves
 2. Hate is a strong word but indicates that attitude we should have about sin and evil in all their forms
 - iii. Hold fast to what is good
 1. Love what is good, seek to do good, hold fast to the things of God
 2. God has told us what is good: "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8)

3. Through the renewing of our minds we can know what is good and what God's will is
- iv. Love one another as family
 1. As Christians we belong to the family of God, brothers and sisters
 2. If we can't love each other within Christian community, we cannot truly and effectively love those not yet part of the family
- v. Bless those who persecute you
 1. There will always be those who cause you trouble
 2. Rather than respond in kind, we are to bless them. The Greek word (*eulogeo*) for blessing means to speak well of or to invoke God's blessing upon someone. "Let your words be gracious and seasoned with salt." (Col 4:6)
 3. This echoes Jesus' command in the sermon on the mount to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Mt 5:44)
 4. We have the opportunity to respond in love and grace when others treat us in less than lovely ways
- vi. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep
 1. One of the most beautiful aspects of Christian community is the life we share together and that includes the good and bad times
 2. I have received this, but also shared it
 3. You don't need to know the whole story or even much at all to enter into these places with others. Be compassionate and willing to be a presence to others
- vii. Live in harmony with one another
 1. We will not always agree on everything, but we can seek to live in peace with each other
 2. Recognize the image of God in others
 3. Have respect and esteem for others
- viii. Don't think you're so smart
 1. None of us know everything and we all benefit from a growth mindset
 2. Be willing to learn from others, to hear their stories and experiences, and be willing to change your perspective.
 3. Be humble
- c. These are all great guidelines for a community characterized by love. Now let's back up to v. 11 for a moment. The end of this verse reads "serve the Lord." Naturally as Christians all that we do should be in service and love for God. But this portion of the verse has a compelling alternate understanding.
 - i. Lord (Gk *kyrios*) or Time (Gk *kairos*)?
 - ii. The abbreviation of these two words in Greek is the same- *krs*. The difference is attributed to confusion on the part of the copyist doing the translating. While "Lord" is the standard translation and understanding, let's see what the word "time" does for the passage.
 - iii. If we understand it as time, it would read "serve the time." This does not mean to let your schedule be your master, nor is it a prison reference. It means to take advantage of the time before you. Take hold of the opportunity standing in front of you. Meet the demands of the time in which we are living.
 1. The demand of the time in which we are living is to hold up our corner and intentionally become an anti-racist congregation. This is our fight. This is our opportunity. We are to be renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we can see what is before us in our community and nation and respond with the transforming love of God. Love is our goal.

5. Conclusion

It shouldn't be a surprise that we aim to have love as our goal. We hear about love all the time, right? Love is the mark of a true Christian. But have we gone beyond a pleasant sentiment that sounds and feels good to concrete action? Love is easy when it doesn't require much from us. But what happens when the call to love requires us to change our hearts, minds, and attitudes? The renewal of our minds is not a passive process. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is work we participate in. We must allow the Spirit to reveal the things in us that are not of God and

allow ourselves to be transformed and have a renewed, Christ-like mindset so that we can fully and genuinely answer that call to love. Answering the call to love as God loves always requires sacrifice of some sort. Yet the sacrifice is worth it as we journey towards becoming who God made us to be, to see the inbreaking of God's kingdom and love in our midst. Are you ready to journey with us? The path might be winding and the terrain unknown, but we are following the One who loves us and leads us onward. Let's journey together. Love is the goal.