

God is Bigger Than... 27 September 2009
Why I don't want to be like Jesus

Welcome & Notices

Introductory Statements

- I saw a church's mission statement the other day
 - It went something like this:
To be more and more like Jesus
- And this is something we're often taught in church
 - "I wanna be more like Jesus"
 - "Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me"
- But as I read that statement I realised that I do not want to be more and more like Jesus
 - And I don't think that Jesus wants me to be more and more like him
- I think that when we try to live our lives as Christians being more and more like Jesus there are two results
 - One is that we start feeling as though we can never measure up, and give up
 - the other is that we start wearing our 'holiness' like a mask — unintentionally
 - * a mask to prove to ourselves and to others just how Good we really are
- You know, I don't think that Jesus said, "be like me..."
 - He said something different
 - * Jesus said follow me, not be like me, follow me, just as you are
 - * Never did he say to Andrew and Peter and James and John, "I want you to follow me, but first you need to be more like me so go and do..."
- I think that God wants us to be more and more ourselves
 - And that it is when we are truly happy and comfortable with who we are
 - And when we become all that God created us to be
 - * That we truly become holy and begin to understand Jesus' message
- So this is what I want to look at this morning
 - And again, this is one of my "God is bigger than..." sermons
 - * Controversial
 - * My journey
 - * May not be yours
 - But I encourage you to engage with the topic.
 - * Talk to me!
- And please, at the outset let me say, that I am not saying that I want to be against Christ, I am not saying that I oppose Christ

- I am not saying that I do not want to grow in my life those things that made Christ a remarkable man.
- I am saying that I do not believe that Christians are called to be carbon copies of Christ, but something more noble than that.
 - To be themselves
 - * And I hope that as I unpack this subject that my thoughts will begin to make more sense
- So let's turn to scripture

Scripture:

Romans 12:1-9

Message

INTRODUCTION

- When I look at Jesus I see someone who really is very comfortable with who he is, and I think that is what attracted people to him
 - He was a whole person, a person of integrity
 - * He didn't try to make excuses for who he was
 - And more than that, that he accepted people for who they were and didn't expect them to conform to some or other random ideal.
- I'm sure that you've had this experience: when you were growing up you looked at one of your parents, and said something like this:
 - I'm never going to be like that
 - * I'm never going to treat my children like that!
 - And what happens, one day you're saying, or doing something, and you realise that what you just said was exactly what your parent would have said!
- I don't know if it comes with middle age, or if we are so shaped by our parents that it is just inevitable
 - But more and more I see myself doing things and thinking "That's exactly my father..." All my life I've said that I won't be like my father, but here I am..."
 - * It seems the more we try not to be like someone the more we become that person
- Conversely, I think, when we embrace who we are, we become ourselves.
 - I look at people, very often who are outside the church, who don't try to follow Jesus, and I look at them and I think that they are actually more whole than many Christians

- * They're not so busy wearing a mask and trying to be someone they're not that they can be real, and that's the kind of person others are attracted to
 - And I think, ultimately, that's what Jesus wants of us, a wholeness, and integrity, rather than a bunch of mini-Christ's
- Let's look at our text.
 - Paul is speaking in this section of Romans, essentially, about getting along with each other
 - * he is speaking about different gifts, loving one another, and the diversity that builds the church
 - He is speaking about people who celebrate their difference, rather than people who are all striving to be the same.
- So I'd like to unpack this passage this morning, looking at it slightly differently
 - Usually we approach a passage of scripture with preconceived ideas in our minds about what it means, and I hope to challenge that this morning
 - * I'm not a Greek scholar, or a Pauline one, for that matter, but I would like to offer some of my thoughts (with the help of others), which I think fit in with the whole of the gospel message as I understand it.
- I think that the essential message of the passage is this:
 - Being me
 - Alive with Possibility
 - Together with others

(1) Being Me

- When I went to high school I fell under some negative influences — as many young people do
 - In my case it was the religious instruction teacher
- See, we had one of those guys who believed that you had no option but to literally whip the fear of God in your pupils
 - And when you got to his class if you didn't know the memory verse for the day he'd whip you
- But I wanted to follow Jesus, and so when he spoke about what you had to be and do to be a good Christian I listened
 - he said, you mustn't listen to music because it's of the devil
 - * So I stopped listening to music
 - he said, you mustn't dance because it's evil
 - * and so I stopped going to parties

- He said you need to put to death your human desires because they are not of God
 - * And so I put to death all of my dreams, and hopes and desires
- And very often this is the way we interpret this passage:
 - “In view of God’s mercy offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God”
 - * The only way we can please God is by becoming shells of who we are, putting to death all that we are and can become.
 - We cease to be me
 - * We suppress ourselves so much, that we cease to exist as the person God created.
- So I want to unpack, in this point, mercy and sacrifice, and holy.
 - The word mercy, here, we often understand in this sense:
 - * We are terrible sinners, but through God’s great mercy, and Jesus’ death on the cross, he is willing to overlook that sin and accept us — if we offer ourselves, as a sacrifice, everyday.
- Mercy, the way a judge may have mercy on a criminal
 - That’s the way we understand it: God’s mercy is linked with our sinfulness
- The word used here for mercy, though, has different connotations
 - It really means that the nature of God is loving kindness, and unconditional love and acceptance.
- “So, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of the fact that God loves and accepts you for who you are...”
 - Not for who you can be, but for who you are!
- What are we to do? We are to offer ourselves as a sacrifice that is holy pleasing to God
 - God is pleased by a sacrifice that is holy, so let’s look at those words together
- Paul was a Pharisee, and one of the things that the Pharisees specialised in, and you will know this, was the law
 - So Paul knew all about the law and what was involved when it came to making sacrifices
 - * You can read about it in Leviticus, if you like
- There’s a list of all the different sacrifices that are required to be made for various reasons
 - But the one thing that was vitally important for a sacrifice of any nature, is that it had to be perfect
 - * The animal that was offered had to be presented free of any flaw or defect

- And the same was true of people
 - You weren't allowed to worship in the temple if you were not perfect, if you had a withered hand, for example, or if you were blind, or lame
- So when Paul says offer yourself as a sacrifice he is saying that you are already perfect, just as you are
 - And the word holy, in this instance, has the greater meaning of offering all of yourself:
 - * your body, your soul, yourself as a whole: as you are!
- So, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of the fact that God loves and accepts you for who you are, offer every part of yourself, yourself as a whole, your body, your soul, your members, as a perfectly acceptable sacrifice

(2) Alive with possibility

- See, we mess up with that word living, as well.
 - I've heard this said, I've probably said it at times: "the problem with a living sacrifice is that it crawls off the altar"
 - * We need to be pinned there
- I love these lines from TS Eliot, Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock:

"The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And, when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out the butt-ends of my days and ways?"
- That's what comes to mind when people say that: everybody should just be pinned onto the altar so they can be put into a nice Christian box
 - unfortunately that box is often a coffin!
- I want to offer an alternative to the word living, all I want to do is change it's placement in the sentence to after the word sacrifice
 - offer yourself as a sacrifice, alive and pleasing to God
- The word alive here means filled with possibility: not a negative term that implies a trying to escape God
 - But a positive terms referring to who we are and how God sees us!
 - * Alive with possibility.
- I'm sure you've done this: you've looked at a small child, and thought "wow — how much potential in held in this small life!"
 - Tis is how God sees us, and how we ought to see ourselves
- And that's what the whole conform, transform thing is about

- Not being so tightly conformed to somebody's idea of what Christ is like that we end up dying inside
 - * But refusing to conform to a message that formulates you, and pins you to the wall.
- The word used for transform is the word metamorphosis
 - It's the word which we use to describe the process of an egg becoming a larva and then a pupa and then a butterfly
 - * The form changes, but the essence of the creature does not
 - A butterfly egg does not become a housefly
- Yet so often this is the message of the church
 - Instead of allowing us to grow into what God has created us to be, we are forced into becoming something that we're not
- So, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of the fact that God loves and accepts you for who you are, offer every part of yourself, yourself as a whole, your body, your soul, your members, as a perfectly acceptable sacrifice, alive with possibility — this is the way we celebrate God's presence with us!
To do this you will need to think of yourself differently. Do not believe someone who tells you, this is how you should behave, or this is what you must be like, or this is what you have to do in order to be acceptable to God — you already are! Rather, your thinking differently about yourself — as one who is accepted and loved by God — should help you to grow more and more into the person God created you to be — like an egg that becomes a larva, then a pupa, and then a butterfly. Then you will be complete and will know God's presence with you!

(3) And with each other

- Remember that Paul is speaking in the context of a community: how do we live and work with other Christ followers
 - He says, simply, do not pretend to be someone you're not, and don't force others to be something they're not:
 - * All of you are different, you do not have the same function, you have different gifts!
- Church isn't an individual thing, it's not about doing it alone, it's about growing together
 - and accepting each other as Christ accepts us, yet so often we try to force others in the church to wear the same masks that we do
 - And we end up being a community of people who are too scared to be ourselves
 - * A community of mask wearers.

- The word used in verse 9 for sincere literally is un-hypocritical
 - And the word hypocrite comes from the mask that actors would wear in a play to portray a certain character
 - * And aren't we good at that in church?
- Let me read a story to you: Shadowless Lands, in Right of Admission Reserved, Light KJ, and Rogers, F.

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CONCLUSION

- Let me close off
- Why don't I want to be more like Jesus?
 - Because I want to be more like me!
 - * I don't want to have to conform to somebody else's idea of what Jesus was like
 - * I don't want to have to be expected to have to hide my real self behind a 'Jesus' mask
- Rather I do want to be like Jesus
 - But the Jesus who was whole, the Jesus who knew who he was, and the Jesus who lived life to the full
- True worship is not to try to conform to somebody's idea of Jesus, but to be yourself, alive with possibility!
 - May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen