

Trinity United Methodist Church Iron Mountain, Michigan
Sept. 23, 2018 Rev. Geri Hamlen 8:00 Worship

Reading from the Holy Bible

Romans 12: 1 - 3 (The Message)

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you:

Take your everyday, ordinary life—

your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—

and place it before God as an offering...

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.

Instead, fix your attention on God.

You'll be changed from the inside out.

Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity,

God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me,

and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you.

Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace,

it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are

bringing this goodness to God.

No, God brings it all to you.

The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us,

not by what we are and what we do for him.'

Message: 'Imagine...'

As we continue with this series on imagination, the John Lennon song keeps going through my mind: **John Lennon 1971**

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace, you

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the world will be as one

That was 1971 and Lennon was really challenging us with a vision of peace and harmony. A vision that the world has yet to see. It would be easy in this day and age to listen to this song and feel kind of cynical. I wonder what Lennon would be imagining today if he hadn't been shot by a crazy man. I wonder too what the Apostle Paul would have thought about this song. The Apostle Paul, of course wasn't the most poetic and artistic kind of guy.

He was more of a practical, tell it like it is person. He was about giving people direction and instructions. And, of course, reminding them of who and how Jesus lived and saved us. He was living at a time when people didn't quite know what to do with the grace and the forgiveness and the hope that Jesus brought to this harsh and difficult world. People didn't know how to be 'Church' and how to live as faithful followers of Jesus. I think sometimes that in this day and age we have found our way back to that same kind of not-being sure place. With all the changes going on in society and the world, it hard to know what next for our church. That's why we are taking this Jubilee Year...to stop and figure out what God wants of us.

So let's take Paul's words and imagine how they might apply to us today...here at Trinity UMC.

Like when he says: ***So here's what I want you to do, with God helping you:***

Take your everyday, ordinary life—

your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—

and place it before God as an offering...

We tend to think of our offerings in terms of these Offering plates and collecting what's necessary for the bills of the church. We think of Giving Goal campaigns (which will be coming up in October) and special offerings like 'Turn up the Heat.' Basically, when the subject of offerings comes up ... we think of **money**.

So much so that we forget: God made us people...with time and talents and the ability to pray and the words to talk to each other and our neighbors. These are the every day, ordinary gifts that Paul is talking about being gifts being offered to God through the church. Everything we think and feel and say can be a gift to God if we remember to offer it that way. If we pause in the middle of what we're doing and say...this one's for you God. Your gift, your offering.

Paul is inviting us to just offer our whole lives to God. Imagine what that could look like. Imagine sitting back and trusting each other to be as generous as we can be...with our money, our time, our words and our prayers. **Trusting God. Trusting each other. Doesn't that remind you of John Lennon's song?**

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one...

Paul goes on to say: Don't try to fit into this crazy mixed up world.

Instead, fix your attention on God.

You'll be changed from the inside out.

Somewhere along the way, many of us got the idea that we are supposed to fix our attention on keeping the missions and the Sunday School and the activities of the church going--just the way they are right now.

Can you imagine what it might be like if we stopped working so hard to keep everything the way it's always been? What would happen if we fix our attention on God and dare to take our eyes off the image of 'How it's supposed to be?' Can you imagine being changed from the inside out?

When we fix our attention, our imagination on God, **today or any day**...there just might be something new and different that happens inside of us. A seed that God will plant. The germ of an idea. A postage stamp of a picture of where God is leading and how we can get there. Imagine that!

Paul says, challenges the readers of Romans: **Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it.**

That's the one we're working, right? In this Jubilee Year we have suspended our mission statement here at Trinity and we're concentrating on Prayer and Reading the Bible and looking at our past. We have let go of some of our 'duties and doings' this year—which may seem irresponsible to some but we are learning through this Jubilee Year how to readily recognize what God wants from us as a church—and then to respond.

Some of you have said to me...this church is fine just the way it is. So why would God want us to do anything different? All I can tell you is that God is a living, breathing, creative power in the world. God's **love** is steadfast and endures forever but God's **world** has been designed for endless cycles of growth, maturity, harvest, rest, even death and then re-birth.

One Church philosopher said: 'When the energy of a congregation is entirely used up, or is even insufficient for maintaining the current status quo...and there's nothing left over for something new to happen. You're in a shrinking, down-hill mode. Take a break and let the God of all newness inspire you.' That's what we're doing here. Looking to recognize and respond to God's loving direction.

Maybe some of you already have felt the touch and the call of God for this Trinity UMC. Anybody have any ideas yet? I am eager to hear...please feel free to write it down with your name so we can get together and talk.

Some of you have told me this is taking a long time. How long does it take to figure out what God wants? It takes as long as it takes. Just remember a thousand years are like a day in the eyes of the Lord. We can do this!

Paul tells us:

Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace,
it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No...**God brings all goodness to you.**

In our human transactions, we want balance. If someone buys you a gift...you want to give them a gift in return. Or at least a thank you note. It feels irresponsible, unbalanced **not** to acknowledge and reciprocate the gifts we receive. But hear the good news: God is always ready to give us so much more than we deserve. And we can never pay back in full such a priceless gift.

Considering the mistakes that we make sometimes. The sins we commit occasionally. The unkindness we display at times. The stinginess we insist on as it suits us.

Why would we even think that we could ever offer God as much as God has already given us? Because God insists on bringing us more goodness and grace and mercy and love. Whether we want it or not! Whether we deserve it or not! Imagine that!

The tough thing is that, we don't always want the goodness God has to offer do we? For example...God is offering to us an opportunity next week-end to find healing, reconciliation and relief from emotional pain. Right here at Church. Yes, you've probably seen it mentioned so many times that it's become background noise that is easy to ignore but let me draw your attention to a Gift from God through our Michigan Conference of the UMC. Only 3 people that I know of have said they are coming.

Do we want to accept this gift from God through our Conference resources?

Do we want to be healed of our hurt feelings and unhappiness?

Do we want to be changed from the inside out?

Maybe the most important question is: Do we really believe God has the power to do all of that? Like Paul said? Like I keep saying...God's love and power and presence is sufficient for **all** of our needs. All of our healing. But we have to want it. We have to choose to believe. Choose to have faith. Choose to let God do what God can do better than any other power on earth or in heaven: setting us free from resentment and fear and unpleasantness from the past so that we can walk into the future unencumbered by a load of care.

Can you imagine that's what God wants for us? Imagine it until it becomes true for you?

Imagine it until you can respond by coming to the workshop and giving God's love a chance.

I can imagine...all of you who love this church.

All of you who can hope for a glorious future here at Trinity.

All of you who want to be unburdened of an unpleasant past.

All of you who want your friends to be unburdened...

I can imagine you all coming to the workshop and being blessed.

Being changed...from the inside out.

And this church...growing strong in faith and hope and love.

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope someday you'll join us

And the **church** will be as one. Amen