

## “A Whole New Way of Life”

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August 16, 2020

### **Romans 12:1-8**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. <sup>3</sup>For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup>We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup>ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

### **Matthew 16:13-18**

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup>And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

My friend Chris Joiner is pastor of a Presbyterian church in Tennessee. A few years ago, he says he was having coffee with a friend when that friend surprised him with an announcement. The friend told Chris that he had recently gone to a yoga class. Chris says that was hard to imagine, given that his friend “is not flexible enough to get out of a low chair, much less a downward dog.” The friend told Chris that he left the class early. Chris was not surprised and asked, “Why? Couldn’t do the poses?” The friend said, “No, the poses were hard, but I can handle that okay. It is all the other new age mumbo jumbo I couldn’t handle. The instructor lights this candle and tells us

to center ourselves, find our inner voice, blah, blah, blah. I tried to tune her out, but when she said, 'Yoga is a way of life,' I left." Chris asked his friend, "What was wrong with that?" His friend responded, "I just wanted to stretch and breathe. I wasn't expecting a whole new way of life."

Pretty much our entire world right now is experiencing *a whole new way of life*. We've learned new phrases like "social distancing," "community spread," "safer at home," and "flatten the curve." We've closed school systems, public places, and offices. We've bought hand sanitizer and face coverings and sanitizing wipes. We've learned to visualize a six-foot perimeter in our minds when around other people. Some of us have barely left home or seen our loved ones in months. All of these are good and wise steps to try our best to avoid becoming infected by the novel coronavirus.

Our confirmands have not been exempt from these changes, of course. Much of their normal way of life screeched to a halt in March. Their school classes were moved online and then their Confirmation Class moved online, as well. It's a whole new way of life – learning about the basics of Christianity, tenets of the Reformed faith, challenging concepts like the Trinity – all with each of us showing up as little boxes on each others' phone or computer screen.

Truth be told, Confirmation signals a whole new way of life even when meeting face to face! It is supposed to be that. It is a time when confirmands take the faith of their families and their church and make it their own. They claim the truths spoken over them at their baptisms. They wrestle with what it means to be Christ followers in their world today. They emerge as full members of the church. It is a whole new way of life.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus asks His disciples first who others say that Jesus is. Others think Jesus is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asks the

disciples the big question – who do *you* say that I am? It’s a question that Jesus asks of each of us. Peter answered, for us all, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

The confirmands answered a similar question. They were asked: “Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?” With their simple “I do,” they indicate the same thing that Peter indicated – Jesus is Lord and Savior.

That is really the single required question for church membership. Yes, we asked the confirmands other questions, and those questions and answers are all important parts of their life in the Church of Jesus Christ, but the essential statement of faith is that they claim Jesus as Lord and Savior.

That’s not so simple a statement. If we affirm that Jesus is Lord of our lives, we affirm that no others are Lord. We affirm that we intend to live our lives in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. We affirm that we will not put others in the place of Jesus, but will look to Jesus alone to lead us in all that we say and do. We affirm that we are embarking on a whole new way of life.

That new way of life involves us being part of that rock upon which Jesus builds His church. Paul writes to the church at Rome that we are *all* the church – the body of Christ – together. *The Message* paraphrase says “Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around.” Paul says that not all members of the body have the same function, that our gifts differ, but are all vital. Put those various gifts together and we are something magnificent. We together work for the common good. We together strive against the darkness around us. The Common English Bible puts it like this:

We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging.

God has graced each of us with different gifts, and we are to use those gifts as our Lord directs. That's how God designed us to function. That's how Jesus builds the Church. And the Church today is blessed to have five new members, each with different gifts: Ellie, Heather, Monique, Emily, and Cecilia. They will affirm that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. They will continue to serve God and others. They will use their gifts for God's kingdom.

So, Confirmands – now Members – stretch and breathe. Welcome to a whole new way of life. We're so glad to be partners in ministry with you. Thanks be to God for the gifts that God calls us each to share! Amen.