

Sermon for Sunday, August 4, 2024

Mark 12:28-34—Love the Lord with all your heart & soul & mind
Romans 12:1-2 do not be conformed but be transformed
1 Peter 1:13 Prepare your minds for action
Luke 2:39-40 Jesus grew & became strong

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The Deep Life of Overflow is our sermon theme for the next five weeks. Today's Scripture texts were chosen to help us focus on one aspect of this deep life: *Loving God with[all] your mind.*

To be candid: this is far more difficult than it sounds. In Romans 12 the apostle Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds," and his statement seems to imply that this transformation is as simple as flipping a light switch. But the reality is that this is a lifelong discipline that must be nurtured, fed, and exercised regularly; daily if possible. Transformation doesn't happen overnight.

Before we think about direct applications of this premise to our lives let's begin with a story of Jesus from Luke 2:39-40. "When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

Until recently very little was known about the Nazareth of 2000 years ago where Jesus grew up. Archaeologists have now found the remains of a synagogue there: that means that there was a place for Jewish persons to gather to hear and study Torah. It suggests that as a child Jesus would have grown up in a community that gathered for prayer and study of Scripture. Foundations of faith and trust in God were established and nurtured for the children growing up in this village. They have also found a specific type of water pot that was utilized by Jews for the ceremonial washing required by the Torah. This suggests that people living in Nazareth during that time were striving to live as observant Jews.

Here's my point. Nazareth was a small village with a group of faithful Jewish people living there. Everyone knew everyone else and watched out for each other. The atmosphere of the village where Jesus was raised surely had an impact on him. In the same way, we know what it means to live in a small community of

faithful people who know each other and watch out for each other. Today when we observe the baptism of Samuel Duane Lindstrom and welcome him into our faith community we are making a commitment to be active participants in his nurture, most particularly his faith nurture; just as the members of the village of Nazareth did for Jesus. The atmosphere of love and caring that exists within this community will shape Samuel in a manner similar to the way that Jesus was shaped by the people of Nazareth.

Vasa's prayer list is very long. It reflects the many challenges that members of the Vasa Congregation are facing. But this community is also one that believes that we are stronger together as we support one another in prayer. We hold the faith for those that are struggling. *(Pause)*

God is faithful. God is at work even when we humans look at a situation and seem to be watching a slow-motion train wreck. My Friday devotion from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest* said this: God does not give us overcoming life—He gives us life as we overcome. The strain of life is what builds our strength. If there is no strain, there will be no strength." *(Repeat the quote)*

We all know that muscles atrophy and lose strength if they aren't used. Faith is the same. There are going to be hard things that happen in our lives. Events and sorrows that we wouldn't wish on our worst enemy. That's what is meant by the statement *God does not give us overcoming life.* God isn't going to orchestrate our lives in a manner that makes them easy and relaxed. Instead God says, "I will be with you. I will accompany you on your life journey." It's much like the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat going across the Sea of Galilee. The storm happened. Jesus didn't prevent it from happening. But he was there. And in that experience the faith of the disciples must certainly have been strengthened. *(I most certainly believe that Jesus is with each of our Vasa members facing the challenges I referred to earlier.)*

The story of Jesus calming the storm comes toward the end of Mark 4. As the gospel continues we learn that even though the disciples were witnesses to powerful miracles, they really didn't understand Jesus' true identity. The transforming of their minds was a process.

The disciple's mental transformation took a long time. We are also disciples. Our mental transformation into ever more faithful persons will take a long time; perhaps our entire lifetime. Just as we don't expect Samuel or big brother Anders to be mature adults

from the moment they are born, God understands that maturing of faith is a process that takes time.

God forgives us when our faith falters. God also calls us to repent—meaning God calls us to recognize how we have failed and asks us to learn from our mistakes and turn onto a new path; one that brings us more closely in line with the call of Jesus.

It's written in 1 Peter 1:13 “Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.” We gather here today setting all of our hopes on the grace of Jesus. We trust that he will love us even when we fail. We have faith that God will give us life as we overcome. That as we exercise those faith muscles our mind will be transformed. More and more we will recognize God at work in our world. More and more we will recognize God at work in our lives. Through that recognition we will be encouraged and our faith muscles will gain strength. *(Pause)*

Loving God with our mind is about committing to be in a lifelong conversation with God. And what is it that God is calling us toward? The answer will be different for each of us. But in order to be prepared for the call of God we must immerse ourselves in daily devotions and reading of Scripture. Close your devotional time with prayer being sure to leave a few minutes to simply sit and listen. You can't hear the message if you don't take the time to listen. God will respond. God will transform your mind and help you to experience the world through God's eyes.

Love God. And then Love our Neighbor.

Yes, the deep life of overflow really is that simple, but it is not easy. It begs one important question: How? We will keep exploring this question in the weeks to come.