

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr., Rector

Scripture: Philippians 1:6

“A Good Work in Progress” (part 2)

A BRIEF REVIEW

Last week we began our series on a small but powerful verse. A promise that is not just a harbinger of hope but a reminder of what God is doing in our lives. It’s found in **Philippians 1:6**. The Apostle Paul writes, ***“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect (complete) it until the day of Christ Jesus.”***

What is the good work? What God is doing for us (salvation), in us (sanctification), and through us (service). What is the goal? – to be like Jesus. Recall another promise from God’s Word in **Romans 8:29**: ***“God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of Christ.”***

And the process by which this is happening is our spiritual transformation. God is transforming us into the person He originally wanted us to be, and that is to exhibit the character of Christ. God is in the process restoring the glory that Adam and Eve once had. Paradise lost will be paradise gained. This is the reason for this book – the Bible - to show us what God has done, is doing and will do to bring all things back to the original way they were supposed to be. And we are part of that process.

What I find really interesting is that after I had decided to preach on this subject a few weeks ago, our Bishop, Bill Atwood, sent 50 copies of two books he has written. One of them is called *“Are we there yet? The Journey to Be Like Jesus.”* The book is a look at what is involved in the process to be like Christ. It is about spiritual transformation and it talks about many of the same things. I highly recommend it.

Now recall last we talked about how God has a purpose and a plan for each person. And before we can know the plan we need to know God. And you can’t know God until you are born again. The truth is if you are spiritually dead, it doesn’t matter how articulate you are, how clear you are, you will not respond to the Gospel. It’s like going onto a battlefield and an officer giving commands to dead soldiers. He can shout all he wants, but they will not respond, because they are dead.

We become alive spiritually when we turn to Christ as Lord and Savior. For it is when we come to Christ that we are given His Spirit.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2**: ***“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. ¹⁴But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.***

Now the thing that keeps people dead is their sin. But once we come to Christ the sin barrier is broken. We have been saved from the eternal consequences of our sin. However, that doesn't mean we stop doing battle with sin. We still have to fight it. We fight it by confessing it, and by walking in the spirit.

So while we can't speed up our spiritual transformation, we can slow it down. The more I sin, the more I am out of fellowship with God. As a result, I am not getting filled with the Holy Spirit and my transformation slows down.

So if I am going to be transformed I need to deal with the sin problem. First, with my relationship with God (be born again) and then with my fellowship with God (be filled with the Spirit).

THE RENEWAL OF THE MIND

What is the second thing that is necessary to be spiritually transformed? The renewal of our minds.

Please turn to **Romans 12:2a**: St. Paul writes, ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*** Isn't that a great verse? How are we transformed? By renewing our minds. Notice that the verb is one that denotes ongoing action. In other words, I can't just renew my mind once – I have to keep doing it.

The memory is a great gift but our minds are under the curse. That means that they are subject to forgetfulness and evil and sinful thoughts. Concerning the former, however, there are a few who have perfect recall. I remember reading about one such woman last year. In her book, *The Woman Who Can't Forget*, Jill Price tells how she can remember everything that happened each day of her life since the age of 10. Brain scans have now shown that parts of Price's brain are three times the size of those in other women her age.

In 2006, the UC-Irvine team published a research paper about Price, proposing a new medical condition for her called hyperthymestic syndrome, meaning that she has a superior memory. Price and her doctors point out that her memory only applies to her own life. She has extraordinarily strong memory of daily personal experiences as well as public events. You might think that a good thing, but Price says that it's like walking around with her life right next to her.

The problem? The painful memories are just as vivid as the good ones. So though our forgetfulness is a result of the fall, it can be a good thing in that the bad memories can fade. However, the same thing happens to the good things in our minds. And that's why we have to keep going over the good things so that we don't forget. We have to keep getting the good stuff in our minds if they are to be renewed. What is the good stuff?

LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON THESE THINGS

Please turn now to **Philippians 4:8**: ***⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.***

2nd Sunday After Pentecost, June 14, 2009, Liturgical Year "B"

⁹The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The good stuff is what God has done, is doing and will do. The good stuff is God's promises. The good stuff is the Word of God! And if I am going to renew my mind it means getting into the Word: meditate on it, memorize it, study it, read it, and pray it.

You see, what happens in life? The second part of the curse on our minds: We are bombarded with negative thoughts: doubt, fear, worry, anxiety, prejudice, judgment, unforgiveness, you name it – it is in here (our mind). And then we get bombarded with negative thoughts from the newspaper, on the television and radio. And then we get negative words from our coworkers, classmates and maybe even our neighbors and friends. And in some places we even get negative messages from the Church - God forbid, the Church – but it is true. Recall it is one of the reasons why we left the Episcopal Church. In fact, I just spoke yesterday to one of our newest families. They came to our church because the priest at their Episcopal Church told them that she believes that Jesus is only the way for Christians but not for all people!

The fact is Jesus said concerning the Word of God in **Jn. 17:17: "Thy Word is truth."** So when I get a negative thought that is contrary to God's Word, I need to remember the source. Who should we trust? I mean, if you come to me saying a word that is contradictory to God's Word, who is the liar? You or God. I pick you!

TAKE EVERY EVIL THOUGHT CAPTIVE

So what should we do when those negative and many times sinful thoughts come, into our minds? The Bible tells us. Please turn now to **2 Corinthians 10:3-5: *³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.***

Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Don't let it gain ground, subdue it. That means rebuke those bad thoughts and focus on the good. When Peter told Jesus that He shouldn't have to suffer, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, ***"Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*** Peter was tempting Jesus not to do the will of God. It was a thought contrary to God's will and Jesus rebuked the thought. When we get a message contrary to God's will and Word, we can do the same thing.

But we also need to limit the negative messages that come from other sources. In fact, even secular psychologists recommend that if someone is dealing with anxiety or depression they shouldn't watch the news. Why? Because that will only make your fears and anxieties worse. In fact, it is a known fact that most news shown is bad news, because sad to say, bad news sells. Try to limit the negative input in your life from others.

Listen, the Bible says that when we become a believer, **we have the mind of Christ.** Do you believe that? What is Christ's is yours. To have the mind of Christ means that now you can see the big picture. You now have been given the right perspective. But our Christian minds are

2nd Sunday After Pentecost, June 14, 2009, Liturgical Year "B"

not fully developed. They are in the process of spiritual transformation. And if they are to be spiritually transformed, then we have to use them. And the way we use it is by renewing them and the way you renew your mind is by getting into the Word of God, getting to Church, and by making sure you are speaking out the Word and the things of God, and talking like a child of God and being around people who think and speak the same way.

That does not mean you totally isolate yourself, otherwise how are you going to reach the nonbeliever? But we need to have more good going in, more of God going in here (our heads) and less of all the junk that is coming at us.

And so true spiritual transformation comes when we deal with our sin and renew our minds. Next time we will look at the third thing that is necessary for our spiritual transformation. Until then, may we continue on the road to be like Jesus. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!