

Romans 12:1-2

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. O gracious and eternal God, we give you thanks on this, your day.

A day to recognize you as our Lord and Savior. A day to celebrate the goodness of the Lord that all of us have found through your Son, Jesus Christ.

A day, God, to invite others in to share in this wonderful life we have discovered in you. I pray this morning that you will use me, thy servant, to manifest your will and your way in your people.

Remove anything in me that might hinder me for being used in a way that will bring you glory.

In Jesus' name, amen. Grace and peace, Trinity Baptist Church. I thank Pastor Greg for that warm introduction.

[1 : 18] I am so delighted to be here. And as Pastor Greg indicated, we are not only co-laborers, but friends in the body of Christ.

So thank you again, and I share your sentiments of it's just good to have friends in Christ. I also want to acknowledge his lovely wife, Jane, who has welcomed me and my family into their home.

And in these very divisive times, we are so excited to share with the world what God can do.

And bringing people who share the faith together, no matter what our backgrounds are, no matter where we came from. We are one in Jesus Christ.

And I'm just so grateful to have both of them and call them friends. Also, I'm glad to see the Dunlops here. I know they are members here, but we call them our associate members as well.

[2 : 30] They fellowship with us quite often, and they too are just real special to the Christian Tabernacle Baptist Church family.

So good to have the two of you here. And I know you're praying for me as you do, even when I'm in my own pulpit. I also want to thank, once again, as Pastor Greg mentioned, many of you who have helped serve in our summer enrichment camp as teachers and leading our free lunch program.

We really try to plant the seeds of the kingdom of God over the 10 weeks that we have all of the children. And I just thank all of you for sharing in that effort.

I really do appreciate it. And we really couldn't do it without you. I would be remiss. I know Pastor Greg mentioned my wife, but I just want her to wave her hand.

Of 26 years, we have been on this journey together. And I just love her so. And my youngest daughter, Camille, is here, the youngest of three.

[3 : 44] And I just love being a father. And on Friday, she received her driver's permit. And as she was taking the picture, it brought tears to my eyes to just know that my last little one will be soon out of the house.

How many of you know it's a great privilege to be a parent? And I just want you to know, what many of you already know, that I don't know a better way to live or to die than the way that God has instructed us in his word.

And so I am just so grateful that God has given me three children and a wonderful wife to journey life with who also loves the Lord.

I do want to thank also Pastor Nick, who has helped me get here today in so many ways administratively. I don't know where you are, but thank you for your help as well.

I want to read into your hearing the text this morning coming from the 12th chapter of the Book of Romans.

[4 : 57] And I'll be reading verses 1 and 2. Romans 12, verses 1 and 2.

And I'll be reading from the New King James Version. And it reads as follows. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may approve what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I want to talk just for a moment. And I won't be long, and I will try not to go into my American Baptist mode of getting too excited, but I want to talk for a moment from the subject of being unplugged. Being unplugged. I love going to the movies. And in particular, I love going to feel-good movies.

[6 : 36] Movies where the good guys win and the bad guys lose. But in addition to feel-good movies, my second genre, if you will, is movies involving action.

And one of my favorite action movies is called The Matrix. And The Matrix, like many series, the boast of The Matrix series is the original one that was produced in 1999.

And in The Matrix, the movie is about humans creating artificial intelligence, what is known as AI to survive. And however, and they don't explain how the computer, the AI machines flip the script.

They learned that they could live independently from humans, but they needed a power source, a source of energy. And so the machines in The Matrix, they determined that the human body contained within itself the energy, the power source that they needed to survive.

And so the machines began to harvest human bodies. While waiting to be consumed, this field of human bodies, they were plugged into The Matrix.

[8 : 10] You have to follow the story. And so the automated artificial intelligence machines had become independent from humans, and they needed humans for energy, and they began to harvest human bodies.

And it was a field of human bodies from babies to adults, and they were plugged into The Matrix. It was a construct, if you will. It was a virtual world.

It was a simulation. So while they're waiting to be consumed by the machines, the machine, The Matrix, is creating a dream world for them.

It's like they were dreaming, but yet it was appearing to them in their own consciousness as if they were alive. But the actor, actor Reeves, somehow became unplugged from The Matrix.

He was unplugged with the help of others, and he came to see life, not as it was, but most importantly, how it should be.

[9 : 16] He became unplugged from The Matrix. You need to understand that because in the text this morning, Paul is pleading to you and I to become unplugged from the world.

In some version, the world is called this evil age. Unplugged from The Matrix of sin, all of us need to be unplugged from the world of sin.

Too many of us, like the prodigal son, we believe that life in its fullest is leaving the Father's care and going off into the far country of the world and living in the flesh.

Many of you have heard the saying that I have found in life to be true, that sin will always take us farther than we want to go, keep us longer than we ever intended to stay, and cost us more than we're willing to pay.

We need to unplug ourselves as children of God from this worldly system. We need to understand God's way is perfect.

[10 : 32] In my daily devotion since the beginning of this year, I've been praying through the Psalms. And basically, one or two days, I will get through a Psalms through prayer.

But I came upon, a couple of weeks ago, Psalm 51. And I've been in Psalms 51, which is David's prayer, and I realized through that Psalms, God was telling me, maybe I have not murdered anyone like David.

Maybe I have not committed adultery against my wife. Praise the Lord. But God was still telling me that I still needed him to create in me a clean heart.

I still needed him to renew in me a right spirit. Because in so many ways, no matter how much we try, it is hard to get unplugged from the world.

It's hard for us to live according to God's values and not according to the world's values. Not only am I saying this morning that we need to get unplugged from the world of sin, we also need to get unplugged from this sense of self-sufficiency, this sense that we can live life without God, this sense that we don't need God for the very air that we breathe, this sense that we don't need God to clothe us in our right minds.

[11 : 58] We don't need God to live life to the fullest. We believe somehow in the matrix of life that somehow when we get up in the morning, it's about us and not God allowing us to rise.

We need to get unplugged from a sense that we can do anything without God. I don't know how many of you are in this season that I am in, but not long ago, I buried my mother, and it was after 10 years of her experiencing dementia.

And I used to think that it was an old cliché by people who were up in years when they would pray in church, thank God that I'm clothed in my right mind.

But I came to realize that's a prayer that is one we need. The older you get, the more that becomes a very relevant prayer. We need to be unplugged from a sense of self-sufficiency.

We need to be unplugged from a world of sin. And then also, God wants us to be unplugged from a sense of, from the matrix of self-importance.

[13:16] I don't know, the older I get, I don't understand so much about why the church has not turned this world upside down. I don't understand why we, like we are today, can't come together and worship no matter what class, no matter what ethnicity, no matter what background.

If we are one body in Christ, we ought to reflect that in the world and make God visible. But somehow we just have not gotten there because we still are plugged into this matrix, plugged into this sense of our own self-importance.

I have found that only in death, when we realize that our worth is not much, when we return to the dust of the air, we realize what really matters is our relationship with God.

What really matters is loving our neighbors as ourselves. Paul says in this text, I beseech you, therefore.

To which, as you know, we should ask, what is the therefore, therefore? Many scholars believe the therefore is there to remind us as Christians then and now of the biblical narrative in which we are to live out of.

[14:43] To remind us that we've been saved from sin. To remind us we've been saved from ourselves being our own God. To remind us we've been saved from our own self-importance.

And to get unplugged, to see the truth, to see the finished work of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. It's time, Trinity Baptist Church, that the church gets unplugged from this world, this matrix, and begin to love God with all of our heart, with all of our minds, with all of our souls.

It's time that we begin to love our neighbors as ourselves. What is the therefore, therefore?

Scholars believe the therefore are there so we can see that before Paul gets to chapter 12, all of the mercies of God that has been extended to us as his children.

And so Paul says, I beseech you, I beg you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, these mercies of God should motivate us to become the people that God has called us to become.

[16:11] And so if I can take a moment to really reflect on the biblical narrative that outlines the mercies of God in the text this morning, that you may begin to live out of this narrative and begin to turn this world upside down, I believe that if we just take a moment on this Sunday to reflect on the biblical narrative of the bountiful mercies of God, all of us will leave this space forever changed.

What are those mercies that Paul reflected on in Romans 1 through 11? In Romans 1, 16 and 17, Paul reminds us that we are justified by faith alone.

In Romans 3, 23, it says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In Romans 6, 23, it says that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8, 12 through 17, it says, we have been adopted into the family of God by the blood of Jesus Christ and are now called to live according, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit of God.

We are his children and we can now cry out to him, Abba, Father. I'm talking about the mercies of God that ought to motivate us to become the people of God that God has called us to become.

[17:56] In Romans 8, 17 through 18, it explains to us we are joint heirs with him. Romans 8, 28, which is one of my favorite verses, says that all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord, who are called according to his purpose.

In Romans 8, 37 through 39, we find these high and enriching words. We are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Paul says that I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8 and 1 says, there is now no condemnation in those who are in Christ Jesus. I'm talking about the mercies of God that ought to motivate us to live this life that God has blessed us with, not

because we deserve it, but all because of God's unmerited favor.

It is those mercies that Paul says that as we go into thanksgiving on Thursday, that we ought to receive with great gratitude and a spirit of thanksgiving.

[19 : 40] And because of those mercies, we ought to manifest the love of God in three distinct ways as we turn this world upside down.

The first thing as we consider the mercies of God that are, I just hit a bit of them, but if you go through Romans, they are filled with the mercy of God that he has bestowed upon us.

And with that backdrop, Paul says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, he wants us to do three things in this world.

First, we ought to present our bodies. As a federal prosecutor, when a defendant was incarcerated, in order to bring him to court, I had to file with the marshals a writ of habeas corpus.

And that writ really indicated to the marshals, you have the body. And before any business can be done, you need to present the body to court. What Paul is saying to us, irrespective of all of the mercies of God, irrespective of how he has blessed us richly, we still have free will.

[20 : 54] We still have to bring our bodies as instruments to be used of God. We still have to present our bodies to God that he might work out his will in our lives and in the world that he's left us, church, to make him visible upon the earth.

And Paul says, we are to present our bodies. As the Old Testament came and presented an offering to God, we are to come with that same spirit and present our bodies to him in three ways.

One, as living sacrifices. We are new creations in Christ. He has made us new, and we are to present our bodies and present to the world that we are not the same.

Something has happened in my soul. God has changed my life. He has turned me around. And the world ought to see that we are new creations in Christ.

All things have passed away. I am now learning Christ. We are living sacrifices. Not only are we to present our bodies as living sacrifices, as a new creation, we are present our bodies as holy.

[22 : 11] That means that we are to show the world that the Holy Spirit is influencing our lives. We ought to show the world that we are operating in the fruits of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace. The world ought to see in all of us that we're not the same. You may be mean-spirited.

You may be an unforgiving so-and-so. You may be racist. You may be self-centered. But I have been changed. I am presenting my body as an influence, one who has been influenced by the Holy Spirit.

We represent our bodies as living sacrifices. We represent our bodies as holy. We represent our bodies as acceptable to God. That term means we represent our bodies as pleasing to God.

As you look at the Old Testament structure of sacrifice, it did a number of things. But mainly, it said to the one, the priest, that there was a way to approach God.

[23 : 21] It said to the one, the priest, that they had to humble themselves and approach God in a way that he has determined that we should approach him.

When we present our bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy in an acceptable way, we are saying to God that it is your way that I'm accepting and not my own.

It's only by doing things God's way are we pleasing to him. So as we unplug from the world, remember that part of being unplugged is that we have to present our bodies as living sacrifices that is holy and acceptable to him.

As we unplug from the world, secondly, Paul tells us in verse 2, not to be conformed to this world. Not to be conformed to this world.

One version says, don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. We are not to conform like the world.

[24 : 32] I set off my remarks by saying I love movies. Now, I also like Westerns. And so there's an old Western movie called Shane. And Shane is about a stranger coming into town and forming a relationship with one of the families there in a time in the 1800s where people were coming in with guns and taking territory and cattles.

And Shane befriends this family and he fights that the outlaws won't take their land. And at the end of the movie, Shane is lined up with six other gunmen and it's just him.

And there's a young boy, a part of the family that he's defending. And this young boy is looking at Shane and these six gunmen and he looks at Shane and he looks at the six gunmen and he yells

out to Shane, Shane, there's just too many, Shane.

There's just too many. As we stand with Christ in a world that seems to be rapidly changing and nobody but us seems to believe that God's word is the word, it seems like it's too many.

It seems like the world is winning. It seems like we're all alone. But I came to remind you, church, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that you are not alone.

[25 : 53] But God has called us to buck against the current. God has called us to stand alone on his word. God has called us not to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation.

I am so, I love the Lord and I don't care if everybody determines that this stuff is not true, it will always be true to me because God has made a difference in my life.

God is saying, don't be conformed. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. I not only like movies, I actually read as well.

And one of the stories that I like is C.S. Lewis' book called Screwtape Letters. And Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis says that while we are trying to make our way in the world, as we get older, we find that the world has made its way in us.

That's where I am. I've experienced a lot of success, but I realize the more I got out there in the world trying to make my way in the world, the more of my Christian self, the more of my Christian values, actually I began to lose because the world began to make its way in me.

[27 : 22] God is saying to us, Trinity Baptist Church, don't be conformed. Lastly, as we think about the mercies of God, the bountiful mercies of God laid out in Romans chapters 1 through 12 as Paul starts his summation of the book of Romans, he's saying present our bodies.

That's all that we have. Present our bodies as living sacrifices, new creations to the Lord, holy and acceptable to Him. He's saying, I know that sometimes like Shane, you're standing alone, but stand therefore.

Don't be conformed. And lastly, he says to us, be transformed. Be transformed. Verse Romans 12, 2 says, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

God doesn't want us just to resist the world. He wants us to change the world. In the Greek, that word transform also means transfigured.

And we think about Christ being transfigured and his face was shining and God wants us to shine in the midst of the darkness like the early church.

[28 : 58] And I just want to highlight a couple of things about being transformed. The early church did not just listen to the word of God. They obeyed the word of God and they transformed the world.

They transformed the world in many ways, but one, they were transformative in the love they showed to the poor. In the early church, the historians have found letters of some of the early church's work.

And some of those letters came from people in the Roman Empire and it showed the early church compassion for the poor.

One historian has noted in this regard, they discovered a letter from a Roman emperor named Julian in A.D. 360 complaining about the charity or love of the Christians to the pagans.

Listen to what the emperor writes. The impious Galileans, which they meant Christians, support not only their own poor, but ours as well.

[30 : 17] They transformed the world, not just listening to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but being transfigured, being transformative by their compassion to the poor.

They took care of the poor and the impoverished and people took note. I wonder how, what in your life that you are doing where the world is taking note that you've been transformed.

Not only did the early church show that they had been transfigured by the gospel of Jesus Christ, by their love for the poor, but they also showed that they had been transformed by their love for the discarded.

Again, in the Roman Empire, and we're reading in the Book of Rome, it was often characterized this world, this Roman Empire by infanticide, infanticide, I'm sorry, infanticide.

And that is, as you know, the killing of infants. Primarily, it was the discarding of female infants that was characteristic of the Roman Empire.

[31 : 29] Females were not as valued as males. And so it was not uncommon for a Roman family that if a wife gave birth to a little girl, that little girl was taken out to the dung heap, the edge of town,

and left to die there by exposure.

In this regard, a letter was discovered, written in 1 B.C., by a Roman name, Hilarion. And he wrote this letter to his pregnant wife.

These poignant and disturbing words. He wrote, If you are delivered of a child before I return home, if it is a boy, keep it.

But if it is a girl, discard it. You see, the early Christians lived out their faith, this transformed faith, in practical and tangible ways.

because the Christian community would climb through the refuge, climb through the garbage, and rescue these discarded little girls, and sometimes deformed little boys.

[32 : 49] And they would raise them like they were their own. they had been renewed. They had been renewed, not just the outward renewal, not just outwardly worshiping God, but they had been changed and transformed in a way that was tangible and practical, and that, in a way that changed the world.

What am I saying to you about being transformed? transformed. Every time you forgive someone who has hurt you, you are being transformed.

Every time you deny yourself for the glory of God, you are being transformed. Every time you love your neighbor, those who look like you, and those who don't, those from different classes, those in different tribes, we have become so tribal these days, everybody has their tribe, their circle, and the church is no different, but every time we break that cycle, every time we unplug from the world system, we glorify God, we show ourselves to be transformed and not conformed to the world.

We are unplugging ourselves by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world, the word says that thy word thy word have I had in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Psalms 119. Every time we love God with all of our heart, all of our mind, and all of our souls, we show ourselves to be a transformed people.

[34 : 39] This word, be transformed, is continuous. We'll never get it perfectly right until Christ comes back, but God is daring us to be different. God is pleading with us like, Paul, I beseech you, I beg you to present your bodies as living sacrifices that is holy and acceptable unto the Lord.

And be not conformed. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mode. Speak to your brothers and sisters who you are passing on the street.

Assume, since America says that it's 80% Christian, that every time you're passing someone, he is a Christian. So why do we walk past each other? We can, maybe God's not calling us to go through the refuse and rescue babies, but at least we can show the glory of God by saying, hello, how are you?

And embracing people with the Christian kiss and a hug. And be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

As I come to the close, there's a story of a young man who goes to visit a hermit in the desert.

[36 : 02] And he finds this monk sitting outside his cave, enjoying the sun, his dog lying lazily at his side.

The seeker asks, why is it, Abba, that some seek God and come to the desert seeking God. And they're zealous in prayer for a season, but they leave after a year or so, while others like you remain faithful to the quest for a lifetime.

The old man responds, one day my dog and I were sitting here quietly in the sun as we are now, and suddenly a large white rabbit ran across in front of us.

And well, my dog jumped up, barked, barking loudly, and he took off after that old rabbit. He chased that rabbit over the hills with a passion.

Soon, other dogs joined in and attracted, they were attracted by his barking. What a sight it was. As the pack of dogs ran barking across the creek, up a stony embankment, through thickets and thorns, and gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of pursuit.

[37 : 42] discouraged by the course, and frustrated by the chase, only my dog continued hotly to pursue the white rabbit.

The confused young man asked what many of you may be thinking, what is the connection between the white rabbit and the quest for God?

The hermit replied, why didn't the others continue the chase? The answer is, only his dog had seen the white rabbit.

They were only attracted by the barking of the dog. what is my point? That once you see the rabbit, you will never give up chase.

Many of us are in church just following the commotion. Many of us in church because others come to church. Once you have a real encounter with the living God, there's no turning back.

[38 : 56] I was a JAG officer in the Marine Corps, and I ran from the calling of going into ministry. I always wanted to be a lawyer, never wanted to be a preacher, never wanted to be a pastor, and I'm sitting in my barracks room, and the presence of God just consumed me, and I heard God say to me, I am here.

And from that point on, I set out to pursue him with all of my heart, with all of my souls, because once you have seen God with your heart's eye, God, if only for a moment.

As Ephesians 1.18 says, your eyes of your heart will be enlightened, and you will seek him forever. Even in the midst of divine silence, you will seek him, because you know that he is real.

God will be to be God. So I encourage you, Trinity Baptist Church, I encourage you to follow me and follow other believers in the pursuit of this awesome God, and I encourage you the next time the world tries to squeeze you into its mold, you're called to be different.

Get comfortable in being peculiar. get comfortable not being like the world. We are on this narrow way, but it is a glorious way.

[40 : 32] And I don't know after 54 years of living, a better way to live or to die than in accordance with the word of God.

Come on, let's give God some praise this morning. Thank you, Lord. Thank you.