

Changing Your Mind

Jim Christensen
Faith United Church of Christ, Richmond Heights, Ohio
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"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."
– Romans 12:2

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart,
be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*¹

I'd like to pick up this morning where Pastor Gene left off last Sunday. He reassured us that God has a plan for us, despite all the difficulties and uncertainties facing us as a church and as a nation. Unfortunately, that *plan* remains unknown to us, since we cannot know the future as we know the past, because we have no memory of the future. As Paul Simon sings, "God only knows, and God makes his plan; The information's unavailable to mortal man."²

On the other hand, the information about God's *purpose* - what Paul calls "the will of God" - is available to us. It's up to us to make our plans, but our plans are bound to fail if they are not aligned to that purpose. To illustrate, let me tell you a story from my undergraduate days of long ago. The year was 1959, and the occasion was a talk given by Bola Ige, the Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, about the plans for the Ecumenical Student Conference on the Christian World Mission to be held at Ohio University(!). At the conclusion of the talk, our minister intern asked him how the success of the conference was to be measured. Bola Ige's reply was, "Don't think about being a hero. Success is God's to give; obedience is ours to give." (By the way, Bola Ige went on to become the Minister of Justice in his home country of Nigeria, and was assassinated in December of 2001. At his funeral, he was quoted as saying that he was sure that Nigeria was worth living for but he was not so sure that it was worth dying for.)

As the Apostle Paul tells us in today's reading, that alignment with God's purpose can be achieved only through a radical transformation of our customary and instinctual habits of thinking and feeling. A literal translation of Paul's saying in today's reading would be "Do not subject yourself to the pattern of these times", what Pastor Gene calls "business as usual". Instead, we are to set our minds on "the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" that "sets us free from the law of sin and of death", for "To set the mind on the flesh (that is, our instinctual desires and fears) is death, but to set the

¹ Psalm 19:14

² Paul Simon, "[Slip Slidin' Away](#)"

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mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

But what is God's purpose for all people, and in light of that purpose, what is his will for us as followers of Jesus the Christ? In our adult Bible study class one Sunday morning several years ago, the late Earl Graham of blessed memory asked, "What does God want?" (Earl always had a gift for asking the hard questions.) My impromptu answer was: "God wants us to be happy and free, loving, compassionate and wise." That answer, although incomplete, was based on an understanding that developed over the course of ten years of study in Tibetan Buddhism, that is, that the "Awakened Mind" of Mahayana Buddhism is identical in all major aspects to the "transformed mind" or, as Paul calls it, "the mind that was in Christ Jesus"³.

The Awakened Mind is one that is focused on four great wishes, and the determination to develop the wisdom to guide our actions toward their fulfillment:

- **Love**, the wish that all beings may have happiness and the causes of happiness;
- **Compassion**, the wish that all beings may be free of suffering and the causes of suffering;
- **Joy**, the wish that all beings may never be separated from the joy that comes from skillful actions; and
- **Peace**, the wish that all beings may dwell in equanimity, free from greed, fear and hatred.

These four great wishes are often referred to as "The Four Immeasurables" because they apply to everyone: our nearest and dearest; our friends who wish us well; our enemies who wish us ill; all people known or unknown to us; and even all the countless sentient beings, that is, those who are capable of thought and emotion. They are also called "sublime abidings" or "divine abodes", for they are the places where God will dwell with us. As Jesus has told us⁴:

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

³ Philippians 2:5

⁴ John 14:23,27; 15:9-12

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And as Paul said in his letter to the Philippians⁵:

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

And now, my friends, please prepare your bodies and minds for a short meditation⁶. Sit upright and relaxed, as best you can, with your shoulders in line with your hips. Don't cross your legs at the knees, as this creates tension in your upper legs and back. Cradle your hands gently in your lap near your torso so that your shoulder muscles are not bearing the weight of your arms. Don't interlace your fingers, as this induces unwanted tension in your lower arms. Place your head in a relaxed position, looking straight ahead, not down, so that your spine, rather than your neck muscles, is bearing the weight of your head. Close your eyes gently and focus on breathing deeply and effortlessly, so that your mind can effortlessly absorb this 2500-year-old timeless wisdom⁷:

Think: Happy, at rest,
may all beings be happy at heart.
Whatever beings there may be,
weak or strong, without exception,
long, large, middling, short,
subtle, blatant,
seen and unseen,
near and far,
born and seeking birth:
May all beings be happy at heart.

Let no one deceive another
or despise anyone anywhere,
or through anger or irritation
wish for another to suffer.

As a mother would risk her life
to protect her child, her only child,
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart
with regard to all beings.

⁵ Philippians 4:8,9

⁶ This preparatory instruction is a very condensed version of [A Basic Meditation Technique](#).

⁷ From [Karaniya Metta Sutta: Good Will](#) (Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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With good will for the entire cosmos,
cultivate a limitless heart:
Above, below, and all around,
unobstructed, without enmity or hate.

Whether standing, walking,
sitting, or lying down,
as long as one is alert,
one should be resolved on this mindfulness.
This is called a sublime abiding
here and now.

The meditation is ended. Let us pray: Holy One, your lovingkindness for your whole creation is immeasurable. Make your home in our hearts, and help us to be better able to fulfill your will that all may be happy, free, joyful and at peace.

*I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,
no sudden rending of the veil of clay,
no angel visitant, no opening skies;
but take the dimness of my soul away⁸.*

Amen.

⁸ [Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart](#), NCH 290