

Micah 6:6-8; Romans 12:1-2  
Rites of passage: Baptism, 18, transfers

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### WHAT NEXT?

[This is written in oral form]

Rites of passages are delightful and holy occasions in the life of the church. They are a part of our worship experience, and we could probably do without a sermon. But, I know all of you would be intensely disappointed if we were to skip the sermon, and time is not a consideration.....

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To be sure, turning 18, the sacrament of baptism and joining our church and **the** church are important markers in life's journey of following Christ in community. They are New beginnings; moments of decision and a time for purposeful focus.

These ceremonies prompt All of us to contemplate our progress / our purpose and condition as followers of Christ.

Rites of passages are indicators of transformation,..... and transformation has been our theme this past year.

Romans 12:1 and 2 was a text used to launch our emphasis on transformation.

These two verses are frequently used when searching for God's will/ when open to being transformed, and so let's examine them.

Verse one states....because of "God's mercy".

The Greek word for this word for mercy has a strong attribute of Love-- much like the compassion of a loving parent.

In other words, it is a gift to us: an inspiring / motivating gift from God to us.... so that we can: Present our bodies, .....and this doesn't merely imply our physical body. Again from the Greek, the word means the fullest expression of selfhood--Our Complete self / all of us.

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Our whole being means not just our polished "churchy" facade, but it also includes our flaws, weaknesses and doubts.

Therefore, God's accepting and loving mercy inspires us and gives us permission to be authentic.....to be open...and vulnerable.

Continuing

We are to present ourselves as a living sacrifice.

A living sacrifice is NOT a burnt offering which is a onetime event--a flash that goes up in smoke. "Living is dynamic; it's growing and developing; it's changing.

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So,....we present our entire selves, including our flaws, aware that we have lots of room for improvement,.... AND THEN.... we hold our breath and wait for rejection????

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NO! According to the text, our entire, growing self is Holy and Acceptable to God.

God accepts all aspects of who we are. God accepts all of us....when we give ourselves to God. There's no conditional clause.

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Verse 2:

"Don't be conformed to this world".

This states: Don't allow ourselves to be changed, molded into something we are not.

The "world" refers to those stuck in the bondage of greed, lust, anger, violence and the disregard for all that is beautiful, creative and loving. Note that "Conformed" is a static condition, and we are to be living / changing.

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Moreover, We are created in God's image, so I think it takes a lot of work to be "conformed" to what is **not** of God.

And please erase Augustine's poison that we are inherently sinful.

That destructive notion can be an excuse for bad choices, and it turns people into victims.

You, all of us, are beautiful / wonderful and accepted and loved by God.

With all that understood, let us make fresh our thoughts about who we are and about God's inspiring, accepting love for us. Doing so...is the process of transformation that opens our minds' eye to grasp God's will for us.

And, while we are at it, let us consider Micah's explanation about what God desires for us.

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God does not want dutiful gestures or meaningless submission to religious expectations.

God requires that we do justice, love kindness and to walk/ progress in a honest, authentic journey with God. That's humbly.

These characteristics describe a relationship--a relationship with all of creation / with each other and.... with God.

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This insight / this advice is not limited for individual interpretation.

God's will-- transformation..... is for all of us-- collectively.

It's for the church, too.

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Therefore, the church in God's will is transforming / changing.

The church Cannot merely be a place to find comfort in rehashing what we already know. We can't be static.

Instead, let us faithfully, **cherish** the Bible, trusting that God's **living word** will launch us into new and refreshing ministries.

Let us seek wisdom in the lessons from the past, and not be bound by old answers that do not apply to today's questions.

We are called to do justice...and...to be kind ...with the compassion of God's loving mercy.

And,.....we need to be / we Must be honest and authentic.

All / our whole being is required in faithfully following Christ.

Our flaws, doubts and weaknesses are part of the whole that includes our many positive and giving attributes.

We Must be real. We must be relevant as we radiate God's love.

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Some of us have turned 18.

Some of us were baptized today.

Some of us transferred our membership.

All of us are prompted to ponder "What next?".

What is next for you and me? What is next for the church?

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The world is a fearful and hurting place stuck in the bondage of ungodly fear, greed, lust, violence and hate.

Shall we the church pour our energy into debating what brought us to this point,

OR..pool our passions on what we know to be true, loving and redeeming? ?????

By the inspiring mercy of God,....we can find God's will in the transformation.

So,

Let us do justice by exposing inequalities, racism and bigotry.

Let us do justice by calling the war-mongers to repentance.

Let us do justice by fighting greed and fear with our peace and generosity.

Let us do kindness by defending the poor and weak.

Let us do kindness by bringing restoration to the First Nations people.

Let us do kindness by caring for God's creation.

And, let us walk in humble truth by receiving and sharing God's mercy.

Through Jesus, God's mercy is clearly seen, and that is what saves us and gives us inspiration for living.

What next.....is up to you and me.