

1 Sermon, October 28, 2012

Texts: Revelation 21:1-5, Romans 12:1-2

Title: "Think Greater – Into the Future"

1. Subtly, little by little, God changes our thinking
2. We know that our thinking has changed when our actions change
3. Sometimes the action comes first
4. Giving is an action. Money is fuel for ministry.
5. Who knows what God will do with the money we give – it may even change our minds!

1. Subtly, little by little, God changes our thinking

You know that our theme for the month of October is "Think Greater." Why talk about thinking greater?

Because we *can* think greater, we *can do* greater.

Part of our United Methodist tradition is the assumption that people, by God's grace, can become more than they have been. John Wesley preached grace, and believed that God could remold us in the image of love.

God changes us – individually and together.

The Apostle Paul, in the letter to the Romans, wrote:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:1 (NIV)

We can be different! God can change our minds! God can change our desires. God can turn us from selfish, cruel people into thoughtful, caring people. God can turn people seeking self-improvement into people who seek justice for the world around us.

God can use us to change the world.

In fact, God is already doing it.

Right here in this church, God has changed shy people into bold people. God has changed lost souls into souls with their roots firmly planted.

2. We know that our thinking has changed when our actions change

And we know when people's thinking has changed because they act differently.

Zacchaeus pledged to give away his wealth. Peter gave up his business and followed Jesus. The woman at the well went and told everyone she knew about Jesus. The Bible is full of examples of changed people, and how not just their mind was changed, but their actions, too.

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The book of James says it well. It asks us not to be just hearers of the word, but doers of the word.

As James says, "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

When a small, dedicated group decided to do something new and start a community meal, something changed. In a real way, that one thing changed the way we look at ourselves. We now see our church as more compassionate, more connected to the community.

I wonder, did our thinking change in other ways?

Have you ever seen a child with an easel and paintbrush and paints? Some children jump right in, because they believe they can do it. Other children hold back, because they believe they're not artistic, or just believe they can't do it.

But when those hesitant children apply the brush to the paint and then to the paper, and discover that something cool happens, their view of themselves changes. That little miracle happens in school all the time.

When I was young, our family seldom hugged when we said goodbye. We just didn't touch each other much. I don't think it was a conscious thing. It was just the way my parents were raised in non-demonstrative Scandinavian-American homes. I don't think we ever thought of ourselves as people who didn't touch much, we just didn't pay much attention.

Then, when I was a high-schooler, I was very involved at church, and adults hugged me. In passing the peace, I would often get a hug. I started hugging my parents when I said goodbye. They started hugging other people.

And I think my family's idea of itself changed.

3. Sometimes the action comes first

It is true that when your beliefs change, your actions also change. But the reverse can also happen. When your actions change, your beliefs change.

That's why we teach prayers to children. We believe that if they say the words of the prayers, it will affect their beliefs.

That's why we practice a musical instrument, or we practice a wrestling move, or we practice putting a golf ball. We do it so the action becomes a habit. By a repeated action, our way of thinking is changed.

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I was looking through Guideposts magazine, and read the story of Jenny Dennis, who grew up in South Africa in a mixed race home. The segregation in South Africa then was so strict that she was classified as neither black nor white, but colored.

Many times she endured having to go to a certain section on the bus, or use the inferior restroom. When her daughter was behind stage at a dance recital, she couldn't use the dressing room used by the white girls. She came to hate white privilege, and hate anyone who spoke with an Afrikaans accent.

The segregation changed when Nelson Mandela was elected president and all people had equal voting rights. But even after all that ended, she couldn't feel comfortable at a beach which had previously been for whites only.

Jenny's husband was a pastor, and had served many colored and African churches. After the end of Apartheid, he was asked to go to a white church in Cape Town. Jenny was more than uncomfortable. She didn't know what to do with those white people. But when she allowed herself to be cared for by them, and confessed her discomfort in worship, the walls started to go down.

After being honest and relating to these new people, her thinking underwent a big change.

Revelation 21:5 tells us that "God is making everything new." God starts by changing our thinking – then everything else becomes new.

4. Giving is an action. Money is fuel for ministry.

Today, we are inviting everyone to think about their financial giving, and turn in a commitment card at the end of worship.

That's an action, and actions can change how we think.

We may give because we're excited about the ministry of the church and want to support it. After all, money is fuel for ministry. It makes ministry happen. John Wesley regarded money as a good tool to be used for the glory of God. So we may be motivated to give by what we believe the giving will accomplish.

Or we may be motivated to give by our love for God, and our desire to give back.

But, more than that, giving is an action, and actions can change how we think. Performing a generous action can make us more

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generous people. So one reason to give is to change our minds and make us more generous people.

Three weeks ago, we had a card in the bulletin asking you to consider a generous person and think about what difference their example made to you.

Two persons wrote on cards about the generous example of their fathers. Their fathers were giving people. Another wrote about a Christian business man who set an example in what he did.

The actions of these people made a difference in the thinking of some of our congregation.

In a little bit, you will have an opportunity to place a commitment card in a basket at the front of the sanctuary. That symbolic action not only results from your own present generosity, but may change your thinking in some way.

5. Who knows what God will do with the money we give – it may even change our minds!

I'm excited about what we're doing today because we're thinking about what our church might look like in the future. Each commitment card will shape the future of our church. Each "Opportunity to Serve List" that is turned in will result in some contribution to what we can do together.

I'm looking forward to what God can do through us in the future, through new and creative ways of learning, new and creative missions, new and creative ways of deepening our relationships with God and each other.

God is good, and I wonder what will come next.

Amen.

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I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and so had the sea. Then I saw New Jerusalem, that holy city, coming down from God in heaven. It was like a bride dressed in her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband.

I heard a loud voice shout from the throne:

God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever.

Then the one sitting on the throne said:

I am making everything new. Write down what I have said. My words are true and can be trusted. Revelation 21:1-5 (CEV)

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:1-5 (NIV)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God. Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him. Romans 12:1-2 (CEV)