

INTERDEPENDENT
[written in oral form]

Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 12:3-8
Proper 16, Year A

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Do not be conformed to this world.

I chose to exclude the first two verses of Romans 12, which contains that command. Too often, we took the wrong interpretation, and focussed on outward behaviours and appearances. It's not really about looking different, even though I admire visual nonconformity.

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*While pastoring my first Mennonite Church, I started rebelling against the pressure to keep up with the latest fashion trends.*

*Perhaps, my reaction came from my older daughter teasing me about my fashion sense, and the realization that someone in their early 40's just cannot pull it off any more. ??*

Anyway, I decided to be radically different, and went out and bought a pair of cowboy boots. [ show boots ] This was in Ohio.

I was truly NOT conforming to the world.

A year later, I became the pastor of a church in Kansas.

By every entrance was a boot scrapper.

Nearly all the men wore cowboy boots.

So much for nonconformity.

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Paul was not talking about physical appearance or black bumpers.

Romans 12 is like a manual for believers and the fellowship of believers. Paul gives insightful instructions explaining how God's insertion leads us to be very different from the secular world.

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Likely, Paul was addressing some issues in the predominately Gentile/ non-Jewish church. Back then, the Gentiles considered themselves superior over the Jews, and Paul would have none of that.

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We could easily spent a few hours going over the details in this text.

[] *Carmen, how much time do I have?*

Okay, I'll highlight just a few things, and you may want to take notes.

There will be a test at the end.

Not the end of the service, but THE End. Anyway....

Paul's intent is to show believers how they are to relate to each other.

Unlike the secular world, there is No hierarchy.

Even Paul is merely carrying out the task, by grace, that he received from God.

Therefore, humility and knowing one's part are essential.
Remember Prov. 3:34: God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Sober introspection will reveal that God has entrusted each of us with gifts. They are God given gifts for a reason.

That reason being: to share ourselves/ gifts with others in the service for God. We call this relationship / this fellowship a church.

This is how and why we function.

No gift is better than another.....because each serves the whole and God.

In essence, we are interdependent.

We are interdependent. We are all in this together doing our part, and each part is necessary AND divine.

Paul puts it this way: "We who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another.

We are individuals,.... we do not surrender that, but we are also part of a whole--the fellowship / the church.

In that collective relationship we carry out what God has called us to do / what God has empowered us to do.

We are one whole. One self, one of many.....with God.

We are equals -- Interdependent.

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Subsequently, we need not compare ourselves with others.

Yet,.....we often do. We sometimes compare our church to other churches, which is pointless.....and not helpful.

When we do compare ourselves with others, it rarely is constructive.

We tend to compare our best with another's worse quality, and then we think we are superior.

OR,... we compare our worst with another's best, and we get depressed..

In God's domain / in God's way for being a fellowship, we are unique, we have been given abilities.....and we are equal in value, and we need each other. Interdependence.

Moreover, we do not expect anyone to be all things. This applies to ministers, too.

*Please remember that.....because staff ministers reviews are coming.*

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We, each one of us, do what we can do, and that is good.

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Nevertheless,..... there is the Matthew passage to contend with.

This episode with Jesus seems to contradict what Paul said.

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For some strange reason, Jesus is curious to hear what others think he is. Or, maybe it is a set up? The disciples tell Jesus what they have heard, prophet and so forth.

Then Jesus asks them, "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon, who we know as Peter, replies.

But first, a bit of background: his Jewish name was Simon Bar- Jonah, "son of Jonah." Jesus gave him the nickname "Petros", which means rock. Petros is Peter.

Simon correctly answers, "You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God."
Jesus is thrilled by his declaration, but quickly notes that Simon's insight was not based on his own deductive reasoning.
Simon's awareness was God given, a gift.

This matches what Paul said--God's gives us abilities and so forth.

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Then the Matthew text gets interesting....because Jesus "seems" / appears to be elevating Peter over others,.....as if all are not equal.

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Moreover, note the exchange; it is significant.

Simon son of Jonah said to Jesus: You are the Messiah!
The Messiah is Jesus' divine calling and purpose--God given.

Simon said "You are the Messiah."

Jesus then said, "Simon... you are Peter" Peter means rock.
Peter is Simon's God given gift and purpose.

This is a fascinating back and forth interaction.
'This is **your** calling'.....and'This is **your** calling.'

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Then, Jesus seems to suggest that Peter will launch / be as a foundation for the nascent [nah sent] church.

Yet,...the message is not so clear.

Also, try not to get hung up with the "bind and loosen" stuff.  
That was rabbinical jingo used for teaching by teachers.

The big question is: Was Jesus elevating Peter's status to be above or more equal than others? ???

Was Peter above the others, which counters Paul's message? ???  
Every time all the disciples were listed, Peter's name was first. ??  
Peter was singled out by Jesus.  
Peter was named as one of the few at the resurrection.

Peter preached the first sermon after the ascension. ???????

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Before I attempt to reveal that he was not above others, I want to point out something very interesting. It is something that scholars still debate what it means.

Verse 18: Jesus said, "You are Peter" in Greek it is Petros which is the masculine form for "rock."

Then Jesus said, "...on this Rock I will build MY church.
The Greek word used here is Petra, the feminine form. ?

Some think that that the Rock in "On This Rock" is actually referring to Jesus, not Simon. So, Who knows? And, there is no definitive reason for Petra, the rock, being in the feminine form.

>Sometimes we must live with questions and wonder.

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Back to Peter's status. And, stay with me through this..... I think I have a point to make.

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To clear the air, there is no evidence that Peter was ever made a Bishop. My apologies to all Roman Catholics.

Yes, Peter had significant gifts and responsibilities, but he did not have authority over the disciples. He did **not** send anyone anywhere. In fact, he was sent places by others. Paul even rebuked him in Antioch. And, we cannot forget that Peter denied Jesus three times. Still, according to John's Gospel, Jesus redeemed Peter with forgiveness and trust.

Peter was a living contradiction.

St. Peter was no saint.....or??.....we are all saints with God.

God knows who we are.....and invests in us anyway.

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I dare say we are all living contradictions. We mess up. That acceptance should humble us, and that's okay.

And, as Paul stressed, our strengths, gifts and virtues are God given, and not by our own construction. That acceptance should humble us, and that's okay.

We are all in this together. Equal,.. and by the grace of God tasked and empowered for a purpose.

No one is alone.  
No one is a lone ranger.  
We are together for a reason.

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So, let us be who we are and accept others for who they are, as we strive to be faithful to God.

Virtues and gifts....AND....failures and contradictions,
We are in this together.....with God,.....with Love.

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A final observation:

COVID-19 / this pandemic DID NOT SHOCK OR DERAILED GOD.

God is still active.... and still creating new ways for love to radiate through us.

The Pandemic has reminded us that the church is not confined by a building.  
I think a new way is emerging, a rebirth is happening.  
We can be grateful that we have the support of a faith community, we are interdependent.

Yet, we are not church for our own sake.  
Our purpose is to be the fellowship of believers,... SO THAT we can share God's love, grace, justice and peace to all.

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With you, with me, with God, with each other..... we can and will get through this pandemic,....AND..radiate the light and love of God for all.

Just be.....YOU....with God with each other,... in love!

By the Grace of God,.....we only have to do our part.
That's all.