

BECAUSE OF CHRIST, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED:

An Altar In The City

Romans 12:1-2

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/because-of-christ-everything-has-changed-an-altar-in-the-city/>

I want to see if you can guess the music I am about to play. What TV series is it from? Mission Impossible! I remember one episode in which the team's job involved a daring feat on a passenger train. After the weary travelers had pulled the night shades, the MI team secretly uncoupled a particular passenger car. But all through the night, they created the rocking sensation and the sounds of the train's movement. In other words, they had the illusion of movement, but really weren't going anywhere!

Our Setting Sail emphasis during this sermons series is all about life-changing faith, because of Christ, everything has changed. In other words, Christian growth or discipleship. What if we really aren't growing as disciples? What if nothing is changing in our lives? But we just have this every-Sunday rocking experience, giving us the illusion of movement. And what if that is true for our church, too? Would you want to know it?

The problem comes with how we measure spiritual growth. We can be regular in church attendance and not be changed by Christ. We can be patriotic, respected in the community, know the Bible well and believe right doctrines, but does that mean we are growing spiritually? We can be active on ministry teams or working for the betterment of our city, but not be changed by Christ. Faith is not mental assent to principles or psyching ourselves up with a good mental attitude. It is being arrested by Jesus Christ and allowing ourselves to be transformed by him, daily. Read vv. 1-2.

"...present your bodies..." That is all of who we are. We don't just go to church to worship; we go to work to honor God, to school, to the store, on vacation to worship and serve God. As *The Message* translates this verse, our "everyday, ordinary life--your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life..." An altar in the city, where we surrender to Jesus. And we daily present our bodies a living sacrifice. The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, said that the only path to transformation is surrender! We are to mimic what Christ did for us on the Cross--surrender!

And note the contrast between being conformed and transformed. The J.B. Phillips paraphrase reads, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold..." Remember. Christians were trying to live for Christ in a Greco-Roman culture, awash with cheap sex, shallow relationships, male domination, the worship of power. Sound familiar? A good question to always ask ourselves is, "Which way is the influence flowing in my relationships?"

But it's even deeper than that. Are we squeezing Christ into our mold? We run the risk of creating Christ in our own image, to suit our rigid, cookie cutter worldview--politics, morality, behavior. You can pour any kind of batter into a cookie cutter. It will come out the same shape. We so often take the way of Jesus and force it into the constraints of culture. And note that "be transformed" is passive. I don't do it. It is Christ in me! The word "transformed" comes into our language, metamorphosis. It's the same Greek word used to describe what happened to Jesus in the transfiguration, when he was completely changed. For us, it isn't our physical form, it's our character, our conduct. Because of Christ, everything has changed.

By the renewing of our minds. I note in the gospels that Jesus was always teaching. The Holy Spirit's role is teacher. But how does that make any difference if we already know everything? Most of us aren't interested in having our minds renewed; we'd rather have our opinions confirmed! We can't be learners if we won't allow our minds to be renewed. Eric Hoffer once said, "In times of change, the learners will inherit the Earth, while the knowers will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

Elisey Pronin is planting a new church in Ukraine. The seminary student we are sponsoring, Sergei, is assisting him. They have 30 members. Elisey tells me the plan is to grow a new church by discipling believers, one at a time. When we don't do that, new ones drop out of church, we expect clergy to do it all and we grow stale and self-centered. Are you ready to become a learner rather than a knower? To daily surrender to Christ and build an altar in this city?