

We Offer a Different Life

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Almost two years have passed since the In Crowd chose its name. After a lock-in and no sleep we talked about a variety of ideas for what the Senior High Youth should be called. After a few suggestions, we seemed to settle on the In Crowd using Romans 12:2 as our grounding verse for our decision. Following this decision, Ben Kitzmiller designed the logo for our T-shirts. On the back of our shirts we have the phrase, “We are in the world, but not of the world” followed by the verse from Romans, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

The idea of the In Crowd can spread beyond our Senior High Youth.

We are called by God's grace to live our lives differently than what the world would have us do. Paul Achtemeier writes in the Interpretation commentary that"

Life under the lordship of God means a life under the structuring power of grace. That power transforms not only individuals, but the individuals' relationships to the community around them. Living by the power of the Spirit, and accepting the gracious lordship of God, the Christians' world has been made new; and the task is now to let the structuring power of grace transform that world into a shape of grace."

Achtemeier reminds us that we should structure our lives around God's grace. Paul follows it up with that familiar verse of not conforming to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can discern the will of God.

The first two verses in our epistle lesson for today are loaded with meaning for us. Paul challenges us to live our lives according to God's grace. We are to try to discern the will of God – to look at our lives and choices and affirm God's grace rather than choosing evil intentions.

Achtemeier furthers his explanation, “

Christians are to shape themselves, their thinking and their doing, comfortably to faith. Verse 2 may be translated: Do not let yourselves be shaped by what everyone else does, but rather let yourselves be

transformed by a whole new way of thinking, so you can discern what conforms to God's will, namely what is good, and pleasing, and perfect. That is grace at work: to be able to hear – and obey! – such admonitions.”

I like Achtemeier's translation of verse two. “Do not let yourselves be shaped by what everyone else does.” This first statement is probably one of the hardest temptations for each of us. It is tempting to go with the flow of society – to use credit cards to have what we want, even though we may not have the money to pay for it. Or to speak ill of someone in hopes of getting a promotion instead of the person we might've talked about. Or we might ignore a person who needs help. Or it might be that we need a certain type of clothing to fit in or the latest cell phone or ipod. Finally, the most tempting thing for us in our

society is our individualistic outlook. It's tempting to overcome "It's all about me. It's about what I want. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, as long as I get what I want."

Thinking about verse two of Romans made me reflect on a conversation I had with Beth Platz back in May. We were talking about young adult ministry in the synod. I remember Beth saying at one point in our conversation that we need to tell our young adults, youth, and adults that we offer a different way of life, one that isn't focused on the individual."

God offers a different way of life. A life that is nonconforming to this world - a life that isn't always a bed of roses. A Christian life is not free from hardship. After all we are called to do counter-cultural actions.

We are to speak out for the poor and the oppressed. We are to strive for peace and justice.

In the remaining verses of the Romans text for today, Paul reminds us that we are called to live in community. In our Christian community there are a variety of gifts that we have to offer. There is not one gift that is superior over another. In fact, we need all of the gifts that each of us has to share the love of God with each other and with others.

Paul's goal in reminding us that we function like a body is that 1) we are all children of God and 2) we each have an important piece to the Christian community. If we take the body image that Paul uses, we can see how we are dependent on one another. For example, just at this worship service there are many people with different gifts: a musician,

clergy, an assisting minister, acolytes, a crucifer, worshippers, and many others who play a role behind the scenes to make sure that our community can worship together on a Sunday morning.

We each have our gift for this community as we respond to God's grace. We also have our God given gifts for use in the world. As we use our gifts we should try to discern what God would have us do to make an impact on the world in which we live as we listen and obey God.

We are in the World, but not of the World.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

