

“In the Spirit” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
April 2, 2017 Fifth Sunday in Lent
Romans 8:6-11

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Throughout human history there have always been individuals and groups of people who want to withdraw from society or ‘the world.’ Usually, these groups that remove themselves from society are trying to create their ‘perfect’ world. They want to improve their lives by isolation from society. The Oneida community and the Shakers are historic examples. Today, there many types of religious communities that also remove themselves from society. For example, convents and monasteries exist in all religions. The people who live in these groups believe that by retreating from the world their lives will be better because they will not be tainted by a world that is out of control, imperfect – or at least not up to their standards.

How would the writer of this letter to the Romans, we’ll say the apostle Paul, address these folks who think that withdrawing from the world is the answer to improving their lives? Paul would not agree.

When Paul writes in verse 6, **to set the mind on the Spirit**, he is not referring to removing ourselves from the world in which we live so we can concentrate on the inner life of faith. Paul is not contrasting ‘the flesh’ and spirit as the difference between body and soul or the difference between sensuality and spirituality. Paul is talking about a way of life. Paul is talking about the way we conduct our bodily life so we use our energies and material resources to care for our neighbor. We cannot do that if we are isolated from others in our own little ‘perfect’ world.

When Paul writes the word flesh, he uses the term to addresses those who seek meaning in their own desires and accomplishments. The people that Paul is addressing are those who are proud of their accomplishment, that turn away from dependence on God.

We all know people who have their minds set on the flesh, as Paul calls this type of life. These folks may be upstanding and outwardly virtuous, but the question Paul would ask: who are these folks trusting? Are they trusting in their own abilities, their own standard of excellence or are they trusting in God? Paul would say those that are trusting in themselves may be doing good, but if they are really doing it for themselves then it is sin. As one of my study books said, “What we do sinfully need not even be immoral, even if what we do is morally good, it is sin if we trust the doing of it to show that our lives are worth living.” (Feasting on the Word, year A, v 2, p136)

Paul goes on to say that, as Christ-followers who believe Jesus is the son of God – you as a Christ follower - **you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.** When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you have the Spirit of God in you. That's a fact. This does not mean that you constantly speak in tongues or prophecy. It means that you have a new reality in your life. Rather than living in a worldly system structured by sin and death, you live in a world with a different set of values, as one writer put it, a different eco-system. (www.Working Preacher, Ann Jervis, Commentary on Romans 8:6-11, Ap 6, 2014). You live in an alternative reality because you live in the Spirit. You are in Christ.

This does not mean that you become 'perfect.' At our Wednesday evening soup supper and service, we looked at the Message translation of this scripture from Romans. I liked how the Message presented this idea that we are in Christ and explained that while we are in Christ we may still be tempted. **But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms.** God realizes that we still are limited by our mortal bodies. We are not perfect. Even though we are limited by sin, we are still 'in the Spirit.' We have Christ in us.

When we live in the Spirit, we are loyal to God, we try to please God, not ourselves. As I mentioned, we looked at this passage on Wednesday evening. One of the people attending mentioned that there is a magazine called, *Self*, and then said, "wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a magazine called, *God*?" And another person said, "and everyone had a subscription to it." Wouldn't the world be different if that were the case!

Being in the Spirit invites us to serve God, to live, love and serve others as Christ did when he was here on earth. While in the Spirit we are still limited by our mortal bodies. We are not to withdraw from the world like those who have tried to create a 'perfect society'. But we are to be involved in the world, to be involved with others, to get outside ourselves.

This passage tells us not to be concerned about self, but to be concerned about others, to have mutual affection for members of Christ's body, gratefully acknowledging our dependence on each other.

How do we do that? We have a great example to follow – Jesus Christ.