

August 14, 2016
Romans 12:1-8
Get In the Zone

I have never swum competitively, but several of my children have. At their meets I was most impressed with the butterfly stroke. The couple of times I tried it always turned out badly. As a result, I have assumed it would be the most challenging race. So, imagine my surprise when I learned by watching the Olympics the other day that the butterfly is actually a "breeze" - once you get into the "zone". When you fall into the rhythm of the stroke, you are "butterfly zoning".

This is exactly what Paul is trying to get across in our reading for Sunday. He isn't discussing swimming, but is talking about "getting in the zone". When Paul writes: "Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.", he is describing "letting go and letting God" - getting into the rhythm of God's intent for creation. He is not, however, suggesting we give up, or give in. Being a "living sacrifice" means living an active, intentional life which flows with God.

Paul contrasts "flowing with God" to going along with what society may say. He puts it this way, "Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind." Jesus began his ministry with a similar idea - "Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15b) Worldly standards, for Paul, can be sinful, just as God's transformation is Good News.

Of course, the challenge is first understanding God's will, or plan, and then following it. For some people, God's plan means pulling into a specific parking space at a certain time. But, I think God's will, or plan, is something else. Paul describes it as "what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect". And we learn what is "good, pleasing and perfect" from scripture and life together in an accountable Christian community.

Scripture is actually quite clear that the order of creation is "good". Six times during the creation story we read that "God was pleased" with what God saw. It is when we begin to distort God's order by following personal agendas or neglecting the fact that everything is interconnected. So, when I mistreat, or deal with you unfairly, I hurt both you and myself.

Paul sees the right way forward in humility, acceptance and cooperation. He tells us, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you should"(humility), "be modest in your thinking" (acceptance), "use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us" (cooperation).

Going back to the butterfly stroke, we need to cooperate with the water. It won't help to fight the stream; rather, we should work with it. Getting into the rhythm of the stroke moves you forward as effortlessly as possible. In life, and in swimming, the smoothest course is to allow yourself to be part of the underlying process by not imposing our will

on it. That is being in the zone. And, as we saw last week, God's zone is love in its truest form - self-sacrifice for the good of all.

Grace & peace,
Pastor Ron