

March 16, 2014  
 2 Lent: Me I Want to Be, Part Two: Renewing My Mind  
 Rev Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

The way we become more fully the person we want to be, is by becoming more fully the person God already created us to be. To accomplish that requires that we filter out the outside influences or our own thoughts that divert us from being the person God intends for each of us to be. We work toward being THAT person when we intentionally take steps to place ourselves in the flow of God's Spirit, so that God can make the changes that we are not able to make on our own. This placing of ourselves in the flow of God's Spirit is the difference between a New Year's resolution and a spiritual discipline.

This week we read the story of Abraham's call to leave his family and belongings behind to pursue a vision offered by God; a vision of Abraham becoming a great nation, to be blessed, and to be a blessing. We also read about Nicodemus being offered the vision of spiritual birth that is as important to his existence as his physical birth; and that by believing in the reality of that spiritual birth, he could receive eternal life.

Today in our preaching and study series we are examining the first step in becoming the person we want to be; the person God created each of us to be; the person learning to live in the flow of God's Spirit. This first step is the renewing of our mind.

There are three pieces to this source of transformation; Vision, Intention, and Method. Let's start by exploring Vision.

Ruth and I met when we were on summer vacation between sophomore and junior years in high school. By the end of that summer we KNEW this relationship was going to last. But we lived 45 miles apart. How would that work? Well, I was old enough to drive, and my mom and dad were going to let me use their car. But what we later found out was, that there would be a cost to using the car, and to having the weekend free. Ruth started getting a list of chores to be done by Friday; laundry, ironing, house cleaning, wash the cars. I had a list of jobs to get done, too. Mow the lawn, burn the papers (!), wash the cars, get jobs done at the trailer lot. But we both finished our list, every time, because we had the vision of how great it was to see each other on the weekends. It was the vision of the joy of being together that made it worth any effort.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is our strength." The vision of knowing that the Lord is the source of our strength moves us past coming to church on Sunday as a duty; way past memorizing the Lord's Prayer or the Nicene Creed. This is a vision of the God who unconditionally loves us, who offers us experiences of joy, who blesses us; the God who delivers to us strength of resolve that can pull us back into His grace when we wander off. We can renew our mind with the visions we hold.

The second piece of transformation through the renewing of our mind is Intention. This moves us beyond wishing we were different than we are, or hoping we could think more positively about life than we do. Intention is having the resolve to make a decision, and then to act.

One of my favorite Bible stories is Mark 2:1-5. Does anyone know it? Jesus was teaching in a home, and it became so crowded that the home and the doorways were filled. Four men carried their paralyzed friend on a stretcher to be healed by Jesus. They couldn't get through the crowd, so they went onto the roof, dug a hole through the roof, and lowered their friend down to Jesus! They knew what they intended to do, they decided how to get it done, and they got it done!

You and I are not spectators in our own life. What we allow our mind to focus on shapes us. We can think like a victim, or like a child of God. We can feel overwhelmed, anxious, and helpless, or we can be filled with peace and joy because we carry the vision of God's grace making all things work for the good of those who love God. (Romans 8:28).

>> Read Dog / Cat diary from Ortberg's book.

Do you think like a dog, or like a cat? We can renew our mind's by having Intention.

The third and final piece of transformation through the renewing of our mind is Method. We can contemplate and evaluate, we can ruminate and procrastinate. But there will not be any transformation unless we adopt habits of life that integrate our vision and intention into the way we live.

I took courses on pastoral care, taught by my parish in New York State. I read books. I talked with people about what to say and do. I studied verbatims, and listened to people critique them. But I finally had to decide to get in my car, drive to a senior center in Watertown, NY, introduce myself to Mrs. Murphy, and let myself BE a pastoral care giver. Method is about JUST DOING IT.

Practice loving a difficult person.

Try forgiving someone.

Give away some money.

Tell someone 'thank you'.

Encourage a friend.

Bless an enemy.

Say 'I'm sorry'.

Read a Bible passage with expectancy that God will speak to you through it.

Worship to praise and adore God.

We can renew our mind's commitment to Methods.

Jesus challenged Nicodemus with a vision of spiritual birth as a palpable reality.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee; very well educated, a person who loved God; but Jesus wanted to free the spiritual person within Nicodemus, to be ALL that God longed for Nicodemus to be. Vision, Intention, and Methods are challenges for you and me to use the mind God gave us, to open ourselves to the flow of God's Spirit; to let that flow of Grace transform us.

(Romans 12:2) Paul says, "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."

Amen.