***Facebook Link:***[***https://fb.watch/kHsSVqOL8k/***](https://fb.watch/kHsSVqOL8k/)

***Service Content and Timeline***

***Bell Choir Piece #1                               0.01:40***

***Welcome & Announcements             0.04.30***

***Holy Scriptures                                     0.14.00***

***Celebration of 11 Graduates             0.16:00***

***Pastoral Prayer                                     0.26.00***

***Bell Choir Piece #2                                0.28.00***

***Sermon                                                   0.33:00***

***Welcome New Member                      0.47.00***

***Holy Communion                                  0.52:30***

***Bell Choir Piece #3                                1.07.00***

***“Be Spiritually Transformed…Throughout Life’s Transitions”***

”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 21, 2023

James Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

**Romans 12: 1-8**

*The New Life in Christ*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God’s mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.  Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-28233a)]

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.  For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**Footnote**

1. [12.2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A1-8&version=NRSVUE#en-NRSVUE-28233) Or *what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God*

We celebrate the Class of 2023!

Congratulations Graduates, Supportive Families, Cheerleading Friends!

We are so proud of you!

According to the Marist List of the Class of 2023 (Formerly Beloit College List)

Those in today’s university and college Class of 2023 were born in 1999.

This class of college students never shared the earth

with Joey Ramone, George Harrison, Timothy McVeigh, or Ken Kesey.

Among their classmates could be Billie Eilish, Sasha Obama,

or Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson’s daughter Simone.

1.               The primary uses of a phone have always been to take pictures or text.

2.               The nation’s mantra has always been: *“If you see something, say something.”*

3.               The Tech Big Four--Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Google -- are to them what the Big Three automakers were to their grandparents.

4.               Nearly half of their generation is composed of people of color.

5.               Because of a terrorist’s explosive footwear at 30,000 feet, passengers have always had to take off their shoes to slide through security before boarding a plane.

6.               This generation is as non-judgmental about sexual orientation as their parents were about smoking pot.

7.               The debate on climate change is over. This Class of 2023 are the first generation faced with the omnipresent reality to actually effect change to combat global warming.

*Greta Thunberg has set the stage for youth activism; now, our graduates are part of a new generation increasingly demanding legal reforms to improve future generations’ lives.*

8.               They have witnessed two African American Secretaries of State, the election of a black President, Disney’s first black Princess, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the Me Too Movement.

9.               They – like all of us -- continue to cope with the tragedy and trauma of the Covid epidemic.

10.            They outlived iTunes and recognize Labron James as the NBA’s greatest living all-time player.

Our Class of 2023 encountered and dealt with changes and transitions

like no other generation.

We stand and sit and support you as your journey with God and God’s people,

through all of life’s transitions, modelling and encouraging one and all to .

This we know, for the Bible tells us so!

The Apostle Paul went through enough changes to fill, what, 28% of the Bible,

including nearly half the 27 books in the New Testament,

each tale and tome and testimony

dealing with changes and transitions he went through.

As his own spirituality evolved and deepened,

he bore witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ,

all the while preaching and teaching, healing and helping

the fledgling faith communities he helped start and foster.

In Paul’s writings and sermons and prayers

he bravely and honestly described the transitions

he and his churches were going through,

transitions he himself made

from sinner to saint to sinner to saint...

In describing the changes,

Paul said to the Romans and he says to us:

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,*

*to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,*

*which is your spiritual worship.*

*Do not be conformed to this world,*

*but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,*

*so that you may discern what is the will of God—*

*what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

Be transformed by the renewal of your minds.

Do not be afraid.

Trust in God,

who lovingly, unconditionally, generously

gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit,

a mighty Spirit to sustain and empower us through life’s transitions.

Trans is a Latin root word meaning across, beyond, through.

Used as a prefix, trans describes when something or someone

is changed thoroughly, altered,

made different than what it or we once were.

For example, Transylvania University was founded further west

than any college in its day,

founded over there, through the woods, trans-syl-vania,

or, to put it in southern talk, *o'er yonder*.

To transcend is to rise above, to go beyond, eclipse, outshine.

To be transformed is to be reformed, renewed, remade in God's image.

To be transfigured like Jesus was atop a high mountain by the grace of God,

is to transform into something more beautiful or elevated,

tochange, alter, to experience a metamorphosis.

Be transformed by the renewal of your minds.

Do not be afraid.

God who made you wonderfully, who orients your soul in goodness,

            is with you in all times and places, experiences and situations,

whether you feel oriented, disoriented, or reoriented,

       God is nigh to guide you to thrive into a renewed mind and life.

Many of us feel or think we are overwhelmed by life’s transitions.

They are so many, so drastic, so fast.

Honestly, the pace of changes around us is accelerated and accelerating.

In Alvin Toffler's prescient book, Future Shock, (1970)

he explores the cultural impact

of the accelerated rate of change we underwent

over last century and into our current age.

*"Change is avalanching upon our heads,"* said Toffler,

*"and most people are grotesquely unprepared to cope with it."* -Toffler, P. 12

30 years ago a sheep was cloned, and the baby lamb was named Dolly.

A New Yorker cartoon depicts Dolly, the cloned sheep, all grown up,

looking in a mirror, wide-eyed, thinking, *"I've become my mother."*

Consider, if you will, just a few of the major changes and social transitions

we've witnessed and gone through together,

all in the past decade or so:

·       The Beginning and the End of Great Recession

·       Social Media Trends (*Facebook, Twitter, Tic Toc*)

·       Ever increasing issues with the lack of Affordable Housing

·       Dramatic Shifts in Retail Trends

·       Polarizing Politics

·       A New Shared Economy (*Lyft, Airbnb, Shared Scooters, Shared Tools in Maker Space*)

·       Expanding Income Equity Gap

·       The Reality of Climate Change

You know, what might be even more distressing than the pace of change

is when our faith, our confidence, our trust is rocked

in the Divine in daily life,

affecting our sense of meaning to whatever is going on.

Honestly, more disorienting than the pace of change, is losing faith

that there is a point to the personal changes we are going through;

or, that we are getting anywhere,

that there is movement, meaning and miracles.

At the core of God’s gift of spirituality is faith,

and faith is grounded in trust,

a trust which perseveres and lasts and lives

no matter the transitions

we find ourselves going through.

A solo hiker walking along a cliff edge

suddenly slipped and found herself sliding down the side of the mountain.

Reaching out a hand in desperation

she caught hold of a small, sturdy plant growing out of the rock face,

and held on for dear life.

She called out for help.

To her pleasant surprise there came a response from above.

She said, “Thank God you are there!  Help me out of this!”

 *“Yes, I will help you,”* the voice said.  *“Let go.”*

She said, “Excuse me?  Did you say, ‘let go’?

*“Yes.  Let go.  Trust me.  I will save you!”*

She asked, “Who are you?”

*“I am the Lord God your Creator.  I love you.  Trust me.  Let go.”*

She paused a minute, then called out, “Is there anyone else up there?”

A living spirituality of Faith begins at the innocent place of trust.

The place of trust.

Claiming a confidence in God’s attention and care.

The dance of Doubt and Faith is held on a foundation of Trust.

Any hope of a vibrant democracy is contingent upon trust.

Even our expectation that the value of a dollar bill is really worth a 100 cents

says it in dark green ink or stamped in metal: *In God We Trust*.

Innocently and joyfully proclaim

that God redeems, values, protects, frees, cares for

those who trust and serve.

Isaiah 26: 3 affirms:*“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace*

*– in peace because they trust you.”*

The book of Joshua begins with God saying:

*“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you****…***

*Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed,*

*for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

“Trust is firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength

of someone or something.” (Wikipedia)

“Trust is the glue of life.

It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication.

It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.” (Stephen Covey)

Trust is built over time and experience, with small victories, one at a time.

Trust can be undone in one fell swoop;

yet trust can also be rebuilt and re-created and re-established,

thanks to God’s gift to us

of the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

There are spiritual relationships between trust and peace,

between trust and community,

between trust and democracy,

between trust and forgiveness,

            between trust and justice,

                        between trust and love.

Long before Paul was saved and redeemed by the love of God in Christ,

Jesus called him and calls us to have a fearless faith,

a fearless trust,

a fearless church,

a fearless community and nation and global village.

The key component of trust is togetherness.

Love one another.

Put aside differences that distract and divide.

Celebrate our commonality and unity in Christian love,

which then empowers us to affirm our amazing diversity!

Regardless of who is in your classroom or next-door neighbor or colleague,

who’s on your committee, in the pew, or in the group,

work with whomever God sends.

Choose now to work alongside

with whomever is your leader, your teacher, your pastor,

your elder, your child, your soul mate.

God has sent these souls into your life,

not for you to fight against or argue with or define yourself over against,

or to do your best to overcome or disdain or undermine;

these blessed souls are in your life

to be your partner in God’s service.

Even if and when you differ.

Love one another anyway.

The Apostle Paul teaches us that to be transformed

is to be reformed, renewed, remade *imago Dei,*in God's image.

By the grace of the Creator,

we are transfigured,

living inside out, bedazzling Decatur and the ATL.

With the help of Jesus the Christ,

we are transcendent,

rising above whatever befalls us,

shining as we answer the call to see and hear, to serve and be.

Thanks be to the Holy Spirit,

we are transformed "by the renewing of our minds"

to become channels for God's justice, mercy and hope.

At the core of justice is mercy.

At the center of mercy is divine love, a passionate love from within, for all,

compassion, community, communion.

On the horizon is our hope, a hope for a better world, a better me and you, a better way,

so close we can see it, right there, within our collective reach,

a hope over there, across, beyond, through, o'er yonder,

ready for us to live into and make real on earth as it is in heaven.

Oh, and our proverbial hiker friend who was last seen hanging on for dear life?

She eventually let go.

She had to.

One can only hold on for so long…right?!

We have to ‘Let Go and Let God’ at some point…right?!

We either learn to trust and live in community,

or we watch helplessly and hopelessly alone

as life moves on and leaves us hanging there…right?!

So, she fell.

She fell through the air.

She fell through a cloud.

She fell through the mist.

She fell through a rainbow.

She fell and fell and fell

 and then she awoke

to find herself sitting on the floor by her bed,

clutching her bed sheet and blanket,

sitting smack dab on the scattered pages of the book

she had been writing when she fell asleep,

a book with the working title of Let Go and Let God.

She found herself laughing, laughing, laughing herself hoarse,

because she could hear God laughing with her,

saying, *“Lo, I am with you, to the bottom of the page.”*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen!*