

“Re-ordered”  
Romans 12:1-21; Exodus 19:1-6; Luke 6:17-31  
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I. Introduction

I was reminded of an old story this week. In a small, country church the preacher was preaching on the importance of a Christian way of life. To emphasize the point he suggested that following worship during fellowship time that the congregation call each other “saint.” So as they greeted each other over coffee and cookies they called each other “saint Pete,” and “saint Martha,” and “saint Vera,” and “saint Frank.” They laughed as they greeted each other, and got the preacher’s point.

That is all but one boy of about 10 years old. After worship he grabbed a couple cookies and went out the door. A man in the congregation saw the boy leave. He was concerned so he asked his friend about it. His friend said, “Aw, he’s fine. He just didn’t want to be called a saint.” “Why not?” the man asked. “Because,” his friend smiled and answered, “his first name is Bernard.”

I remembered that old story this week during our Older Adult Ministry tour of St. George’s Serbian Orthodox Church on South Keel Ridge. We visited the church to view the iconography and the frescos, or paintings, on the walls. It was an interesting art and religion tour.

At one point the priest asked if we Presbyterians had saints. I shook my head and said, “No.” And as I thought about that I smiled when I thought of our possible saints; “saint John Calvin,” “saint John Knox,” “saint John Witherspoon,” “saint Jonathan Edwards”.... the “saint Johns.” It’s probably better we don’t have saints.

We are part of a western church tradition which in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> C CE reacted against icons, or images, as idolatry. And we are part of a Protestant tradition that rejected the veneration of saints. Sometimes our Presbyterian forbearers got a little crazy with that, and threw out the art too. Fortunately our Presbyterian theology has come to a good balance; art and beauty are not God, but the wonder, mystery and beauty of God can be expressed in art. We don’t have saints, and we don’t have icons, but we do give God thanks for the beauty of art, and believe art is a language that can tell us of God.

But our Orthodox friends are part of a long Christian tradition that includes saints and icons. The paintings on the walls of the church tell the stories of saints. And the icons, Byzantine styled paintings of saints Peter, John, Paul, the Virgin Mary, George and Nicholas, are a part of their church and worship life.

We don’t have saints and icons. Nor do we call each other “saint.” But we do believe that the way of our life matters. We do believe that Christian faith is not just about words we speak and sing, and ideas we might have. Rather, we believe that

Christian faith is also about choices, values, hopes and ways of life.....ways of life that can be different than the ways of life around us. After eleven chapters of theology in Romans... ..eleven chapters of words and ideas, Paul now writes of Christian ways of life.

## II. Text and Brief Exegesis

### A. **Read Romans 12:1-2.**

Paul speaks of “living sacrifices”.....that’s total commitment. That’s “all in”.....”pick up your cross and follow me”.....”24/7/365.” Salvation by the grace of God received by faith requires a new way of life. We are already saved by what God has done in Christ. It’s done. “It’s finished” (John 19:30) And that salvation from God leads to a re-ordering of life now.

This new life.....this re-ordered life.....is not conformed to the values and way of life around us. It is a way of life that is not pressed by the promise that your life will be great if you jump on the consumerism carrousel. It isn’t hooked by “three easy payments,” or “super-sized.” It doesn’t care about keeping up with the neighbors, or having your kids or yourselves live crazy calendars of endless activities. This re-ordered life doesn’t confuse stuff for love.

Rather this “living in God’s salvation” is new life.....different life.....re-ordered life. As Paul says, it’s being “transformed.” It’s the Greek word “metamorphosis;” being completely changed like a caterpillar into a butterfly in the same, old world. It’s being different that the world around us, and different than before.....like paying for the guy behind you at a toll booth.....or calling the cashier at Giant Eagle by her name on her name tag....or sending a random note of thanks to a friend. This transformed life.....this re-ordered life, can feel like going the wrong way on a one way.....but it’s really the right way, and everyone else is wrong. It’s living what you think heaven, the new creation, eternal life, will be like.....now. There’s no “same old, same old” with living salvation. Rather it’s giving ourselves to something now...that matters eternally.

So what does re-ordered, living salvation, life look like?

### B. **Read Romans 12:3-8**

Re-ordered life is life in Christian community. It’s life together. The grace of God that saves us is also the grace of God that gifts us to share in community. Christian life is not “all about me.” One of the tragedies of the Christian faith is when the gospel is prostituted as a self-help therapy, or a blessing lotto, or a get rich quick scheme. Rather, Christians always find real life by giving life away in community. We are blessed by God so to be a blessing to others....gifted so to share gifts.....forgiven so to forgive.....loved so to love. There are no “Lone Ranger” Christians. Re-ordered life is lived in Christian community... ..sharing gifts given by God.

And this is really the center of Christian stewardship. The gospel re-orders life so that we share the gifts God has given us in our community; time, talents and money. And our life together is richer when we share the gifts God has given us to share. Paul just mentions a few here; prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, generosity, leading, and compassion. How goes the gospel in your life? Has it re-ordered things so that you are sharing in the life of the Christian community? Has it re-ordered your life so that you are a generous, joyful Christian steward of what God has given you? That is transformed life....living salvation life..... heaven on earth life.

Paul goes on.....

### **C. Read Romans 12:9-21**

This re-ordered, living salvation, life is characterized by love in the Christian community. We act in love toward each other. It's turning from ways that are evil, and clinging to ways that we know are good and right. It's honoring and respecting one another. It's being humble. It's being models for each other in hope, prayer and patience in hard times. It's generosity and hospitality. Whatever the season of our lives, teenagers, adults, seniors, or senior seniors, it's living in ways of love toward each other.

This is no small thing in churches today. With all the changes and pressures on churches Christian life together is coming undone. There are schisms, conflicts, fighting, lying and gossiping in churches. The challenges of our day have laid bare the character inside, and sadly it is often dark and self-serving. It reflects more the conflicted way of life in this world, than life like Christ. In my 20 years in our historically quiet presbytery our Committee on Ministry has never been busier than it is now dealing with churches who are trying to destroy themselves. It is now more important than any time in our recent past for churches, for our church, to bear witness to the re-ordered life of love for each other.

And in relationship with our non-Christian community we live in peace. Or as Paul says in verse 18: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." This doesn't mean retreat from the world, or reflecting the values and practices of the world. Rather this re-ordered life means we live differently in and with the world. We are to build relationship with non-Christians by laughing with them, crying with them and praying for them. We don't get caught up in the cliques and judging of the world, but befriend people from all walks of life. And we don't "get even." Rather we follow the example of Jesus and work to find ways to transform anger into grace. Out in the community Christians also stand up for what is right and good. As the tragedy at Penn State has reminded us this week, "all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to say nothing." Evil is not overcome with evil. Rather evil is overcome with good people doing the right thing.

### III. Final Reflections

Christian faith is not about just waiting around for new life in the new world. Rather it's living new life in the same old world. It's re-ordered life.

It has always been this way. In the text from Exodus 19 we hear about re-ordered life. Saved by God's grace from Egyptian slavery, Israel is to live a new way, a different way, a 'living salvation' way. They are to live life together in ways shaped by the Ten Commandments. And in doing that they will be God's priestly kingdom and holy nation.....a community of saints in the same old world.

And it's what Jesus is teaching in Luke 6. In this re-ordered, living salvation, life those who were once poor, hungry and sad find life. They respond to enemies and hurt with prayer and love. They overcome evil with what is good and right. In this re-ordered life forgiveness flows 70 times 7, Samaritans love their neighbors, and outsiders like Zacchaeus find a place at the table with Jesus. In the re-ordered life healing is more important than religious rules, and love is a greater currency than gold. In this re-ordered life the story of God's love is shared in generous handfuls, like someone sowing seed everywhere she goes. In this re-ordered life the least is the greatest, and resurrection overcomes death.

Icons, or images of saints, are more than art. In the wonder of Orthodox worship icons are to remind and invite worshippers into the mysterious presence of God. In worship the line between present and eternal, living and dead, worshipper and saint is blurred, and people join the faithful throughout the ages in the glory of the living God. There is a thin veil for the moments of Orthodox worship between earth and heaven. The icons of saints remind Orthodox Christians of reality deeper than they normally know.

No, we don't have icons and saints in the Presbyterian Church. But I'm thinking and believing that in living re-ordered lives.....living salvation.....there is a thin veil between earth and the kingdom of God, between the old creation and the new, between passing order and the new heaven. In re-ordered living some of heaven comes to earth now.....and we share in something more than we normally know. And maybe, in a way, we do have saints.....living saints.....saints with a small "s" .....you and me.