

Transformers

Genesis 3:8-15, 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:1

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

June 10, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

(Walk around with mirror). What do you see when you look in this mirror? Say it out loud if you want! I'll start: I see wrinkles on my face and some dirt on my robe! My hair looks pretty good but I'm too short.

If you are like most people, the first thing you see when you look in a mirror are what you think are your flaws. When most of us take selfies, which is like photographing a mirror, we often see the same thing, which is why I avoid taking selfies!

What happened in the story about the Garden of Eden is that ancient storytellers imagined that in the beginning of human life, we did not judge ourselves and others as anything but wonderful, beautiful, perfect. The story of the serpent is trying to explain how all that fell apart, and the story uses the image of the man and woman hiding, afraid of God, because they were "naked." They had always been naked. But now, because they were ashamed at having disobeyed God, they perceived themselves as less than beautiful and perfect. "Don't look at me, God, because I'm not good enough for you to see." You can almost hear the anguish in God's voice, "Who told you this!" With self-doubt comes conflict and comparison and the endless desire to change into something you are not, which leads to greed and envy and a penchant for blaming others. God is sad, in the story, and before the woman and man are cast out of the Garden, God sews clothing for them, a sweet statement of love. God clothes them in caring, hoping they will remember who they are.

But, of course, they forget. The story picks up that terrible sadness that we forget we are made in the image of God, every single one of us. And all the conflict in human life from Biblical times and before until today stems from our forgetting. When I was in Korea at the DMZ, one of the saddest monuments there is the Wall of Stones. A man and some assistants went around the world visiting battle sites from ancient times to the present, taking a single stone from each site. Those stones are embedded in a wall

to remind us how often we war with each other. I found that wall heartbreaking. It was a mirror showing our failure to learn to love.

But Paul writes to the church in Corinth, a church often torn by conflict, that as Christians, something else should be happening with us. He says that by Christ's life, death and resurrection, we are pulled out of this endless cycle of hurt and hate. He says that we have a hope unlike any other of transcending the death that comes from hatred of our selves and others. He says that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom! Freedom from guilt and fear, freedom from being defined forever by our flaws, our sins, our sense of being "less than," our hopelessness. Paul says that when we look in the mirror, what we can see clearly is the glory of God, a new or re-creation.

(Walk around with the mirror) Paul says, "Look in the mirror. Look closely. Not at the wrinkles or zits or unruly hair. What you see, Christian, is that you are being transformed into the image of God, bit by bit, day by day, prayer by prayer, hope by hope, love by love." Paul says to Christians all the time that in Christ we are literally re-created. New creation. As though we can get back to the Garden.

He goes on to say that we let go of the "things one hides," we no longer are hiding from God like Adam and Eve; we are able to be honest, not to blame someone else for our actions, and shed that fear and shame and whatever else holds us back.

Sounds easier than it is, though. As we read last week, Paul says that on his Christian journey, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."

So that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

"All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. So that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."

The life of Jesus, the living glory of God. What did that look like? Not "what did Jesus look like?" What did his **life** look like? Close your eyes a minute and think of anything you remember ever hearing or reading about the life of Jesus before the crucifixion. (Pause) Now ask yourself what it would look like for you to be freed to be transformed in your body so that Jesus' life was visible in you?

Quite frankly, there are days for me that this seems impossible. I think for Paul, too, which is why he wrote "Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart."

Do not lose heart. You were created in the image of God. You have forgotten that from time to time and forgotten also that everyone you meet also bears the image of God, and so you have not always treated them as they deserve. You are forgiven. More than forgiven, you are freed to be transformed into something altogether new, bit by bit, if you will allow God to do so, if you will imagine your body, your voice, your brain, your actions, as the life of Jesus made visible.

Before I come to Hartford each day, I spend some time at home in devotions. Often, as I end my prayer, I do this. (touch each part of body) "God, I give you my brain, my eyes, my nose, my ears, my mouth, my voice, my arms, my hands, my legs, my feet. May all of me serve you." Stand a moment and try that with me.

(Take mirror around again) Look in the mirror again. You are being transformed from one degree of glory into another. The life of Jesus is becoming visible in your body. Claim the freedom of that truth. Do not lose heart. Amen.