

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Rom 12: 1-8      **“Be Transformed”** (08/21/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

*Going down the stairs....*

God's peace with you!

For the people, who follow us online on our website - Let me describe what we see here. In front of the alter we have piled up hazardous [häs'rdes] materials; many, many old paint cans, which we found in the church basement and many of us have brought chemicals this morning to the service, so that we can do a drive after church and bring them over to the Dept. of Public Works (450 Milburn Ave., Hempstead), three miles away. But we need to bring them over until 3 pm, so this sermon can't last forever ... ☺.

What has this to do with our sermon text? ...Don't be afraid, we will read it in few moments... The sermon text will be about the different live people have –maybe better: ARE ABLE to have, when they are ready to accept Christ as their compass – and not an ideology, be it communism or capitalism. ...

Do you know what this chemical mountain hides in this moment? It hides, what we usually see clearly, but maybe often not recognize consciously: The in our altar table engraved words “This do in remembrance of me”. What a strong symbol: Our industrial waste, our so wasteful life style is between God and us. We cannot see Christ anymore. Our hazardous garbage is not just, not fair to the environment, God’s creation. But our hazardous garbage is also not fair to the generations to come, your own children. And it is already not healthy for us, as too many of us have already asthma, skin cancer or other diseases, which are -scientific proven- based on our life style, especially in our country.

Let this have been now the introduction. Let us now see what YOU think about today’s sermon text. Let us take now our bibles. Let us go to page 161 in the New Testament Section. Let us read TOGETHER from Paul’s epistle to the congregation in Rome, chapter 12, the verses 1-8.

### **The New Life in Christ**

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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.*

**3 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. <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup>We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup>ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup>the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”**

AMEN.

I have today TWO questions for you. The first one is: Which part of the text would YOU take to unroll the rest? And second question: Why?

*Going around with the micro ...*

Like always many ways into our text are possible. I personally start with the verses 3 to 5. Why? Because they tell me to see me ALWAYS in relationship to others, to see ALWAYS the impact, my acting has for others. I should not think about myself “more highly than I ought to think”. But this only works, if I put myself into relationship to God and God’s creation, inclusive you, my human

neighbors. If I drive 3 cars, you must be also allowed to drive cars. You must have the right for the same carbon footprint I have. ALL 6.94 billion people on earth have the same right to live. Have the same right for a good life; a life with fluent, clean water ... water to drink and to wash.... the same right to live in good houses with parquet [par-ké] floor as I do or to have the same good education as I had, we all probably had.

It is justice, that we all have the same rights. But it is also justice that my freedom ends where yours start. Freedom is not absolute. Our economical and social systems are mistaken, when we privatize profits, but socialize the damages. To see myself in relation to each human being on earth asks me to think global.

I just found again what a UCC-member in Chappaqua once sent me; you all probably have heard it one time. But even you know it: It doesn't hurt to hear it again:

**If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people and retain all the existing human ratios of the world ... this is what the village would look like:**

**There would be**

**57 Asians**

**21 Europeans**

**14 would be from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south.**

**8 Africans**

**52 would be female, 48 would be male**

**70 would be non-white, 30 would be white**

**70 would be non-Christian, 30 would be Christian**

**93 would be heterosexual, 7 would be homosexual**

**6 would possess 59% of the world's entire wealth and all 6 would be from the US.**

**80 would live in substandard housing**

**70 would be unable to read**

**50 would suffer from malnutrition**

**1 would be near to death, 1 would be near to giving birth**

**1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education**

**1 would own a computer**

I am not sure how old these numbers are. Maybe some of these numbers have changed. But I am sure not much. And if: Did they change in the right direction? To more justice? Everything what I can read, hear and see is that the gab between poor and wealth gets wider and wider. What is now the Christian message? For me the Christian message is: Peter, don't loose sight of your neighbor. Not everything what I COULD do does God WANTS me to do. How do YOU understand this text? Do you agree that freedom cannot be absolute, but that freedom can ALWAYS and ONLY be a freedom in GOD, in and with CHRIST? Christian freedom is always limited

through the respect to each other, but therewith also open to the other. And the other person is in our globalized days, in which our way of living effects the lives on the other side of the globe, VERY close. We affect the lives of others, usually the ones of those, who don't have the voice and power as we have. Today we do justice through the way how we consume, how often we drive our cars and WHICH cars we drive. In earlier days Christians could be identified by signing fishes into the sand as their secret sign of recognition – and their social behavior to EVERYONE, independent from social class or reputation. Today Christians recognize each other when they refuse plastic bags at the checkout of King Kullen and Waldbaums. With conspiratorial smile they recognize their clothing bags, while waiting in the checkout line. Today Christians help our still speaking God by witnessing God in being different. Different to the many, different in the awareness, that God is a God for us all – worldwide. ...and that we can hear God speaking only in worldwide solidarity to each other.

Jeanne for the Elders and Magan for the Board of Mission: This is what I meant, when I asked you, if you would consider leading us all to become a global ministry church. It means: To be in active and personal partnership with people in other cultural and social contexts.... Maybe even with people, who suffer environmentally or socially because of our needs for resources, which we take out of THEIR grounds while OUR companies make the big profit. ... I also look forward to the development within our own church, IF we change our own behavior and management of the church, when the trustees

under the leadership of Susan lead us into and hopefully through a green audit process.

Only through the eyes of our anonymous suffering fellow being we can see God. Only in the arms of the ones, on which we built our unjust wealth we will find (maybe) their forgiveness and peace. It is what it is: God makes us looking at each other. As Equals. And asks us to cooperate with each other. God does not want a society, in which people just look at themselves, being selfish and only interested in their own interest. God wants liberation into a justice, which allows peace to happen. Our peace. Not a false peace, promised only for sometime in heaven. No, a peace, which we can anticipate already here on earth: Through acknowledging of our own being, our own needs, our yearning souls, our gifts.

How god-less has our society become. People have to have several jobs – and still can barely earn enough for their children. People have no rest. The fewest in our society can take more than one week off from the job – because they fear to loose it. Is this what the mothers and the fathers of this country wanted, when they called for separation of church and state? I say: We don't need less God, we need more God! We need the Christians with the clothing bags in the grocery stores, the Christians who buy organic products, who work for labor rights, helping hard working people to have a life in dignity.

Our text today calls Christians to be close to their own feelings, to be close to their relationships and to honor those. When you are in love – love! Go and surprise the person who has touched your heart. When you are in pain: Acknowledge your pain! Don't run away. You are worth to acknowledge your pain. Did you get hurt by somebody? Express your hurt. Be yourself!

To take God serious starts with taking first ourselves serious: Our own feelings and needs. But while most people get in our wonderful, NON-Christian value system stuck here: For us Christians the real fun only starts from here. We Christians are sustainable people. Others would say: We Christians are odd folks. We always want to know how the other one is REALLY doing. For us it is not a set phrase – for us it is a real concern. This is what Paul talks about, when he asks us to be “**one body in Christ ... and individually members one of another.**“

Wow – who would have thought that Christianity could be so damned concrete??? 😊

AMEN!!