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Date: December 13, 2015
Sermon Title: The Mind of God
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scriptures: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16

Romans 12:2

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.

1 Corinthians 2:16

'For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?'
But we have the mind of Christ.

"The Mind of Minolta." People always ask where we get ideas. We like to say that God gives them to us, and that's true more often than we might admit. But sometimes the thought process, the idea process, is a bit odd.

Each summer it is my job to come up with the theme and the Scriptures for our Advent Devotional and then find the writers. This year, my theme is "The Mind of God." Doesn't that sound good: THE MIND OF GOD?

It led to some tough Scriptures, and my writers said it was really tough writing. Their job was to look at the Scripture I assigned them and then ask, "What was God thinking?" But this all began with that phrase bouncing around in my head: "The Mind of Minolta." Anybody remember that? It was an old advertising campaign, and it was definitely designed to give you the impression that there was something super-special behind Minolta products. It was not just a thing, it was an inspired thing; the voice even sounded like the voice of God: "*The Mind of Minolta!*" Presto! I had my theme: "The Mind of God."

It was fun then to go through the Bible and look for stories and verses that really made us wonder, "What was God thinking?" So I gave Art McCain and Art Thurnauer the creation story, Genesis Chapter 1. "In the beginning God created . . . and God said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. You have everything you

need.' And God saw that it was very good." Each man took a different tack. Art Thurnauer focused on the beauty and wonder of creation, reflecting on Pope Francis's visit to America and the Christmas opportunity to embrace the whole world with a great sense of peace, humanity, and care for the earth. Art McCain looked at the variety of creation theories, even the "Big Bang," before surrendering to mystery. He writes:

"What banged?"

So I don't really understand "when" or "where" or "what" in either creation story, never mind "who" or "why." Yet created we are; here and free to wonder at it.

To me, both stories leave me saying [what Job said], "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I do not know." (Job 42:3)

Awesome!

Art McCain

It's not easy knowing "the mind of God," but the Scripture we read a few minutes ago invites us to. Romans 12:2: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed." *Be transformed*, how? "By the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

And to the Corinthians St. Paul writes, "For who has known the mind of the Lord?" Answer: Us! We, you and me, the church; we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16) In other words, we don't always have to look outside, "We have the mind of Christ." We actually can look inside to understand God at work. We really can know what God was thinking! We may not get all the ins and outs, we may not agree all the time, we may want to push back sometimes, but we are invited into "the mind of God," to learn, to listen, to struggle, to question, to argue, and yes, to believe.

Meg and Jen are a couple in our church who have been much in our prayers the last year or so. First, Jen had a stroke. Then last spring Meg suffered a horrific bicycle accident up near Bethel. Since then, it has been an endless round of surgeries, infections, and more surgeries ahead. Two weeks ago, Jen was in Norwalk Hospital with a seizure. Last week, Meg was in the same hospital with an infection. Through it all, their love and faith and friends have, if anything, made them stronger. And in the middle of it, they wrote their devotion.

I gave them the Christmas Eve story of the angels scaring the shepherds before reassuring them with the famous Christmas verses, "We have brought you good news of great joy for all people! For unto you is born this day a Savior, the Messiah. You can go and find him, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12)

Listen to what they write, emerging out of their challenges:

Finding God in our life is different for each of us. Some seek it after having a personal crisis, an illness, or traumatic injury, or sensing a need for greater fulfillment. No matter when or why we seek the Lord's presence, the greater question is: will you pay attention to the signposts in front of you? Will you be terrified when His presence is upon you (much like the Shepherds were terrified having never seen an angel before)? Will you be open to understanding His message? Will you be scared of the unknown?

It feels obvious, perhaps understandable, to seek the Lord's presence after navigating through a year and a half of personal traumatic injuries. And, to say that we needed a bit of joy in our life would not necessarily be an understatement.

But it came in a series of steps and events. Not always understanding the means to the end, one might say we went forth somewhat blindly. Or did we? Were our past events intended for us to find ourselves seated at church on a Sunday morning in August when volunteers were sought to participate in the writings of Christmas devotionals? Is it just a coincidence that we were given this Scripture and verse, about the greatest joy of all?

When God has a message, He finds a way to deliver it. Whether through an Angel saying, "Don't be afraid . . ." (Luke 2:10) to asking the Shepherds, the lowest on the food chain, to spread the word that Christ our Savior was born (Luke 2:11), or other times through the heart of a human, tasked with writing a devotional for the people of the congregation.

We won't be so bold as to say that God has tasked us with delivering His message. But rather that receiving His message of joy and His message to spread joy is our debt of gratitude to share. That at a time when it would be easy to say, "bah humbug," we find ourselves reacquainting ourselves with the real meaning of Christmas, the joy of Christmas, the birth of Christ.

In the most challenging times, we find ourselves reminded of the journey that led us to this community/fellowship, and it feels like homecoming.

Meg Lowe and Jenny Day

Their message is a fact of faith: we are invited both to know and to mystery. For Meg and Jenny they reject “bah humbug” and choose to see God at work, even in the mystery of great challenges.

Susan and Jerry Hood did much the same. A lot of our devotion writers through the years share very personal stories that illuminate, that teach, that take us a step further into “the mind of God.”

The Hoods wrote about the death of Jerry’s dad. He was a great man, but not a church man. The Hoods, as we know, are immersed in church. They serve our church in a million ways. Their dad’s absence of church life made them wonder about his faith, especially as his life neared its end. In a beautiful way their faith helped Jerry’s dad face mortality with a faith that was deep inside him, waiting to come out—not in church attendance, perhaps, but in goodness, in living a life in sync with God.

The verse I gave the Hoods, Matthew 5:4, was one of the toughest: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Here’s a couple with sorrow still fresh, and I toss at them Jesus’s bromide, “Blessed are they that mourn.” Or more accurately, translators tell us, “How happy are you when you mourn.” Those aren’t two words we normally put together, but evidently, in the mind of Christ, they go together just swell: happy mourning, happy grief, happy sorrow. That is certainly a verse that invites us to dig deeper.

What could God possibly be thinking? Well, it led Susan and Jerry to think deeper about faith, about goodness, about family, about good endings, and good life and a good God of grace and forgiveness. Together, they found comfort. “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be *comforted*.” Yes, it works! You are “blessed” if you ever have the privilege of caring about somebody so much that, yes, it really, really, really hurts when they’re gone. Such love, such sorrow, surprisingly, is its own reward.

I had a funeral a couple of weeks ago for a dear lady, Sue, married to her husband for 72 years. Wrap your mind around that: 72 years! Let me tell you honestly. Being with her husband of 72 years, seeing—I mean *feeling* his sorrow, looking in his eyes and seeing that loss—it was a beautiful thing. It was sweet. It was a comfort in itself. I read that verse to him, and he understood, even through the tears, he was a blessed man.

We are on the cusp of Christmas, aren’t we? The church is decorated, we have a Nativity scene on the lawn, and our Sunday School did its Christmas pageant. It’s 68° outside. Flowers are blooming on my back patio. But we

are on the cusp of Christmas. And along with the mystery and miracle, we do wonder, "What was God thinking?"

Or, in the language of younger people, "What's up with that?" What's up with the Virgin Birth? What's up with the star? What's up with frankincense and myrrh? What's up with God coming as a baby, born to a poor family in an oppressed country in the Middle East, for Pete's sake?" And, "What's up with the refugee story? With Jesus, Mary, and Joseph escaping slaughter in the Middle East to live as refugees in a foreign land?"

And who would have thought that to say that in 2015 would be a political statement? A poor, homeless, refugee family escaping slaughter. Who would have thought that merely telling the Christmas story would be a political act?

The Mind of God! Always . . . gets us thinking.