



Sermon, August 9, 2020
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Junction City United Methodist Church

Sermon Series: Reboot! JP21

“Overcome Evil with Good”

Scripture: Romans 12

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. 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.

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

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Wizard of Oz and revealing the wizard

Do you remember the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, and that famous scene where Dorothy and her friends are seeking an audience with the Wizard after they have secured the witch’s broomstick, and they are trying to get Dorothy back home to Kansas? They are in the Wizard’s throne room, and Toto goes over and pulls back the curtain to reveal the wizard as just a humbug, ordinary person with special effects and a microphone. I

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always think of that scene as being a good illustration of what the words “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” actually mean: “drawing back the curtain” or “revealing what seems to be hidden.” All secrets out in the open. With this image in mind, I think I can say with confidence that we are living in Apocalyptic times.

People are waiting for things to get back to normal, get back to the way they were. But the Christian faith is not like that. It is not about getting back to normal. It begins in death – Christ’s and ours – death to the old way of dominance, destruction, and dysfunction in the world. Just as Jesus was resurrected in a new and glorified form, so our lives in Christ (as Paul puts it) are changed and glorified. We can’t go back to the old. And this process continues to happen in our lives and in the world all the time. The COVID-19 pandemic, the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Global Climate Justice movement are all coalescing to pull back the curtain and look behind the façade of contemporary civilization and culture. It is a truly apocalyptic moment of revelation. And every apocalyptic moment is a time of transformation, of death and resurrection. It is a moment of struggle, of shuffling off the mortal coil of what has been in order to emerge into what is new. And like every such struggle, it hurts like heck.

Paul and the early followers of the Way also lived in Apocalyptic times. Jesus came and proclaimed that the Kingdom or Realm of God was at hand and was accessible here and now. He showed how this Realm of God existed in the Bigger Minds of those gave themselves to the Path and were transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He showed how the Domination Systems of the world did not express God’s will, and how his Way overturned the ways of greed and class divisions and ethnic hostilities, just the way he overturned the tables in the Jerusalem temple. Those Apocalyptic times were times of intense revelation – revelation of the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of that system of power and

domination, and the revelation of a new way of being and living that expressed the will and heart of God.

In many ways, Paul’s Letter to the Romans expresses what this new Way is all about, and today’s reading sums up Paul’s understanding of how to live in that new reality. As we have been exploring the JP21 (Jesus Path for the 21st Century) Process for Disentangling from Systems of Domination, Paul’s letter helps us to understand Disentangling Step 7: *Help others who suffer from the effects of oppressive, dysfunctional, and destructive Life Operating Systems*. Let’s look at what he has to say.

Verse 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.” This, in a nutshell, is what JP21 is all about. It is having our minds and lives transformed and renewed—made like new—by the Spirit of God within us. What this renewing and transformation will do for us is to erase the old tapes we have playing that cause us to look upon other people as objects to be used or abused or criticized or put down or harmed in any way. It replaces those with a new realization that all persons are precious in the sight of God, and therefore we must value those we formerly scorned as highly as God values them.

Verse 4: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” The renewed, Bigger Mind of Christ within us changes the way we look at other people. Instead of always thinking about “us and them,” it suddenly sees how we are all connected together. We are all in this thing called life together. Seeing that interconnection, we need to start living differently:

Verse 9: “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.” There are a lot of people who like to mouth the words about loving others, but their actions just don’t hold up to what they proclaim.

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Paul was aware of this, so what follows is an elaboration of how to hold fast to what is good, and how to overcome evil with good. And why do this? Because Jesus did it and commanded his followers to do it.

1. **Verse 10:** “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor:” The Way of Love that Jesus taught is a way of doing those things that tend to the well-being of other persons. Paul says this needs to be mutual in nature. We all need to give love as well as receive the love others give us. We serve, and we allow others to serve us. Mutuality is what it’s about. This is how we weave the web of human community.
2. **Verse 12:** “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.” Paul is not talking about some Pollyanna faith full of teddy bears and cute butterflies. He understands that the times are tough and cruel, and that people will suffer because the systems of domination are cruel and inhuman. Nonetheless, hang in there. Hang on to the hope spoken into our hearts and souls that God’s ways are not humanity’s ways, and that we will overcome, just as Jesus said, “I have overcome the world!”
3. **Verse 13:** “Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers:” Note how Paul breaks down the overused phrase, “Mission begins at home?” or “Take care of our own first?” This is a both/and proposition: care for those in the faith community AND take care of strangers, people outside, foreigners, passers-through, etc.
4. **Verse 14:** “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” This tells me to listen to the people I’m opposed to, and even to wish them well! Boy do I find this hard to do these days. But this seems to me to chip away at the deliberate efforts that political operatives and even Russian agents have made to force wedges between people in the US. So the question for us these days is how do we face those who actually mean us harm without becoming just like them?

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5. **Verse 15:** “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” In a time of turmoil and struggle such as what we are experiencing today, it is important to keep in mind that each day we each have things that beset us, and that we work to overcome. So it is important to celebrate the milestones in life, the achievements, the joys that come along, as well as reach out to one another in support when we grieve or hurt.
6. **Verse 16:** “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.” After years of singing in choirs, I have a good sense of what harmony is all about. To sing in harmony you have to listen to one another and match what you are doing to what others are doing and work together to create something beautiful. You don’t do the same thing, but you aim at the same goal. It is unity through diversity. That’s what our times are calling for.
7. **Verses 17&18:** “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” What is noble in the sight of all? Certainly what is noble is that which cares for the lost, the least in society, that views people equally and works to make it be true that all persons are treated with equity and judged for their own actions, not in terms of artificial categories such as race or class or ethnicity. Being noble would mean not seeking to further divisions in society but to work to bring enmity to an end, not fan the flames of discord.
8. **Verse 21:** “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Our times are filled with evil. Evil does seem to be grabbing the headlines. But there is also great good everywhere. People of all shapes, sizes, ages, colors, ethnicities, and backgrounds are coming together to demand that we end racism in the world, end the sexual harassment of women, get serious about the harm we are causing to the environment and changes we are causing in climate. There are

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people working every day to solve these problems and raise awareness and provide ways for people to address the racism and sexism and hate and negativity that they have imbibed just by living in a society filled with dysfunctions. People everywhere who are dedicating themselves to such causes and work are overcoming evil with good.

I want to conclude with video from a YouTube station called *Some Good News*. This clip is from April of this year, and features a broadcast from the International Space station. I include this just to remind us all just what we can achieve when we work together cooperatively, contributing to one another and seeking to increase our knowledge and love of our world. And also just what can happen when we expand our point of view to include the whole world.

YouTube URL: <https://youtu.be/fDfDo180uEE>.