

Sermon, August 23, 2020

Scriptures: Romans 12:1-8; Isaiah 51:1-6
“Seeds: Growing in Grace: Pressure”

By Rev. Dr. Brian Jones



One of the most amazing things, with all the knowledge we have, is how much we don't know. I mean, we know a lot, of course. But for all of our information, there are still things we see that we simply can't understand.

For instance, until a few years ago, scientists said it's aerodynamically impossible for a bee to fly. The physics and what we knew of aerodynamics simply didn't work. Body too big, wrong shape, and the wings are too small. Thankfully, no one told the bees. Of course, because they had empirical evidence to the contrary, bees fly, they knew the problem had to be in how they understood aerodynamics. Finally, they realized where their thought process was faulty, and lo and behold, bees not only fly but are considerate enough to do it by aerodynamic principles.

In a way, that's not a bad definition of faith, is it? Seeing something or witnessing something so powerful that even though everything else says it can't be, you have evidence to the contrary. Bees fly whether we like it or not.

Free divers are much the same way. Do you know what free divers are? It's pretty self-explanatory. Free divers are those who dive to great depths without the use of oxygen tanks. The idea is to see how far one

can dive and how long one can hold their breath. The current record is a dive of 831 feet, which is only about 400 feet short of a quarter mile. The longest a deep diver has held their breath is, and I looked this up several times, just slightly over 22 minutes.

Now, scientists understand some of how this works, but not all of it. And for many years, they simply had no explanation as to why someone could dive to such great depths or how anyone could possibly hold their breath for that long a time. And yet, even though they know that it shouldn't be possible, it is.

The issue, of course, is having to deal with the incredible amount of pressure that is exerted on the body. The deeper one goes, the more pressure the water brings to press in, crushing in on the body until organs, everything else, simply gives way. The further you go, the worse it gets.

And then when one wants to ascend, one is still dealing with the pressure and the buildup of nitrogen in your body, makes you euphoric and confused. The body has had its' air containing spaces compressed, the way the gases act in your bloodstream is altered. So altered that as you experience these changes, your body loses much of its buoyancy, and you enter what the divers call freefall as you sink like a stone.

As you can imagine, it's a dangerous sport. I told you a few moments ago that the freediving record is about 831 feet. The person who made that dive experienced traumatic injuries due to being at the depth and ascending too rapidly. It was feared he would never walk again and would be confined to a wheel chair and in need of home healthcare. He has recovered, although his balance and coordination to this day is still hampered. But not when he is in the water. He still free dives.

How many of you, as I described what free diving was like, thought to yourself, welcome to my world? How many of you have expressed not just a few moments but a lifetime of pressure? How many of us feel like that every day, constant pressure put upon us, squeezing the air out of us, squeezing the life out of us. So much pressure, it's difficult to move?

That pressure can come to us in many ways. But specifically. whatever the pressure is, it's trying to change us, and by exerting inward pressure on us, change the shape of who we are. We are pressured to fit the mold our parents or the adults we respect in our lives are trying to put us in. I know people who are still feeling that pressure from their parents long dead being forced to be something that they are not, an ideal for happiness that they don't fit. We have pressure from the world not only to perform, because we get that. Pressure to perform at our job is to be expected. They are paying you to do a task. But what often surprises us, it's the pressure not to perform, but to be. Some work in environments where there is constant pressure to let go of your ethics. Turn your back to what is right for the good of the company. To at the very least ignore what we see going on around us that's wrong.

We come home, and it's another pressure, again pressure to be someone, pressure, molded. There are days when we feel as if there is constant pressure on us, and we have become so manipulated we're not even sure what our shape ought to be. We go from one moment of pressure to another. What are we to do when we feel like a free diver, there is pressure all around us, and we lose our buoyancy and enter into a free fall?

We are getting ready to finish up our series on seeds, the things we are to plant in our spiritual life in order to see growth. Now, the thing about seeds is if you want to have a harvest, you can't plant seeds a day before you want to have a harvest. I can't plant corn on Monday and have corn on the cob on Tuesday. The same holds true with dealing with pressure. If you want to deal with the pressure that's being exerted on your life, you can't wait until the moment of pressure in order to deal with it. And I think that's why so many Christians allow themselves to be shaped by the world around them by pressure. We assume we can deal with pressure when it comes. But that's often too late. We have to deal with pressure before it happens. We have to plant some seeds.

That's why Paul in this passage of Scripture says *don't be conformed to the world*. Now, when something is conformed to something, it takes the shape of whatever is on the outside that exerts pressure inwardly. Think about those old Play Dough sets where you push on the lever and squeeze the Play Dough through the star shaped hole. Ever felt like that?

Paul knew that's what it's like for the church. It was like that in Paul's day, and it's like that today. The world will always exert pressure to make you to resemble it. Why? Because if you do not conform to the world, you are a reminder of a deeper and greater reality the world doesn't want to deal with. I'd rather you conform to my ideal of vengeance because I don't want to see its' people forgive. I don't want you to be trustworthy, because that forces me to look at the possibility not everyone is false. I'd rather you conform to my standards of free floating ethics rather than see you hold to absolute truth.

Paul says do not be conformed to this world but be transformed. Transformation is pressure working from the inside outwards. The only way to deal with the pressure from the outside is to have a greater pressure working from the inside. I believe Paul says do everything you can to allow Jesus to renew, remake, your mind. Allow Him to heal and change your thought life and your mindset. Not just what would Jesus do, but do I think as Jesus thinks? Is my mind on what is Holy? Do I have compassion toward the same people to whom Jesus was compassionate? Do I love what Jesus loves? I heard the transformation of the mind described this way the other day. Think to yourself *what if Jesus was the great love of my life. What would I do?* And then go and do that. That's how you plant seeds to fight the pressure. What if Jesus were the

great love of your life, what would you do? Go and do that. Allow your mindset to be transformed, and you will find the pressure from outside isn't so great, after all.

And you'll find that pressure can be used. That's why free divers can hold their breath so long. The pressure from the outside makes the oxygen over 50 percent more effective. When you live as Jesus is the great love of your life, not only will you resist that pressure, but you'll be able to use it as a witness of how much God has changed you. And that witness can transform the world. Amen.