

Sermon, February 28, 2021
Psalm 19 & Mark 12:29-30
“Transformed: How to Deal with How You Feel”
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How is your Lent going? That's an odd question, isn't it? How do you answer? *Good* seems like we aren't putting enough effort into it. *Bad* seems like we aren't being very Christian, as well. So let me ask this. And you can answer to yourself, but if you've given something up for Lent, are you staying consistent with that?

I am, but it's hard. I don't often talk about what I've given up because that seems really not the purpose of abstaining from something for Lent. That's a private moment between you and God. But I have given something up for Lent this year, something different, and it's been interesting.

This year, other than making personal posts, I've decided to step away from a lot of social media. At least commenting. And there are some parts of social media I've stepped away from because they just seem toxic to the soul. Now, I read what people post, I just don't comment. Not on politics or religious issues or sports or anything else. Even when people are wrong.

And that's hard. But it's been really good at the same time. Because for good or bad, I'll see something knowing it's incorrect, and I'll want to correct it. Which can lead you down into a bad rabbit hole. But let me

tell you it's nice to have a time when you can read something you disagree with or might upset you, and you just go on. Let it go. The world doesn't stop spinning, and the Lord is still on the throne. And no one seems the poorer for my not commenting.

Not that it's always easy. I find myself beginning to comment, and then I remember. *John Calvin was a better theologian than Wesley*, and I'll start my cogent argument but then stop. *This person is the worst baseball player in the country*, again, I'll start to comment and then stop.

My most difficult moment recently was because I am a big, as you know, fan of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. I find incorrect statements on their writings particularly egregious and ripe for comment. And I confess I was about halfway through making an argument over something I knew was wrong in an observation on Tolkien's writing, and I had to stop. It's Lent, don't comment.

So I am going to take it out on you this morning. Not really. But the person commenting had totally missed the point; one of my favorite scenes in the book and the movies of the *Lord of the Rings* has to do with a King named Théoden. In both book and film, we meet him, an old frail man close to death, weak. A former shell of the man he had once been.

But in truth, he isn't that at all. He has been poisoned by the words of his trusted advisor who gives him not good advice at all. Whispering things into his ear that, over the years, slowly took the life, heart, and vitality out of the good King. Tolkien's point is we ought not believe things because they are beautifully said and that words can poison us if we are not careful. It's much like the wallpaper in Victorian times whose patterns were laced with Arsenic because it helped bring out beautiful patterns. Beautiful but also deadly. Sometimes seemingly beautiful things can be deadly and drain the life out of us.

This can be especially true when poisonous words are whispered into our ears. And when we start believing those poisonous words are true. It's even more dangerous when we realize the voice whispering those poisonous words into our lives is our own. When our own emotions and feelings begin to whisper those lies into our ear.

We may experience a whisper, sometimes in one word telling us that we are no good or don't have value. Or the whisper that tells us we are not loved. We may hear a whisper that tells us God doesn't love us. Or that He doesn't care about us or what we are going through. Heard long enough, we will start believing and embodying those poisonous words.

Or those whispers telling us we should have hatred for someone. Hear it often enough and we will move from believing that hatred is wrong to seeing it as a perfectly reasonable response anyone would have if they experienced what we did. We move to the point where that hatred is not only a perfectly reasonable

response, but the only right one any rational person would have. Feelings and emotions whispering poison into the ears of our hearts.

Can God transform our emotions and the way we react to them? The idea God wants to transform all of our lives, that we cannot compartmentalize transformation, has been one of our major themes in our small groups and messages. And the simple answer is yes, God can indeed transform our emotions and the way we deal with our emotions. He can free us from the poison and lies sometimes whispered into our ears.

So how does God transform our emotions? First, God asks us to embrace them, I think as Christian we want to categorize emotions into good and bad emotions, ones that are appropriate and ones that aren't. But that's a really unhealthy way to deal with our emotions. Our emotions aren't bad. None of them. They are a part of our being made in the image of God. Look at the Psalms. David runs the full gamut of every emotion. God never chastises him for having emotions or feeling a certain way. Because David embraces all of his emotions and says right or wrong, this is where I am in this moment, God is able to transform those feelings.

But as we embrace them, we also need to see that not every emotion, just because we have it, is healthy or warranted. Can you see the difference? If you are dealing with rage and anger, you need to embrace it and say *this is where I am*. But also know just because you are angry or are dealing with hatred that it's not always appropriate.

We embrace, we admit they are not always directed in the right way, and then we surrender. Look again at our Gospel lesson. Jesus calls for total surrender. This is a part of the Hebrew prayer known as the Shema. Look at that word, all. **All means all**. If Jesus is the Lord of our lives, then we must surrender our feelings to Him. *God, here is what I am feeling, I admit it knowing You are always right, and I surrender them to You. Direct my emotions in the way they should go.* Because that's really key. Love is good. Love for another than your spouse is bad. Hatred of a neighbor is bad. Hating sin is good. Having a sense of rage that people are starving is good. Rage about a person is bad. God, I own up to my feelings, but I surrender them to You so they may be directed in the way that honors You.

Finally, hold onto the eternal truth. Now that's really important, because you may not realize it, but your feelings and your emotions can't be trusted all the time. They will lie to you. Like that whisper in the ear of the king. Just because you feel unloved doesn't mean no one loves you. Just because you feel that you have no value doesn't mean you don't have value. Just because you feel as if God doesn't care or isn't listening doesn't mean He doesn't hear and act on every prayer you pray. I can't tell you how many couples I have counseled over the years who say well, I just don't feel like I love this person anymore. And they do. It's clear the love is there, it's just that they've gotten used to believing their feelings are right.

Better to hold to the eternal truth that is true whether we feel it or not. God does love you. You are loved; even if you don't feel it right now, you are loved. You have value. You have a purpose in life. How do I know? God's word says so. And God's word has never whispered a lie into my heart. Eternal truth is true even when I don't feel as if it's true. And when we embrace that truth, before long, we do feel those emotions, we feel loved, we feel joy directed in the right way.

How do you stop that whisper? Embrace your emotions, it's OK for you to have them. But know just because you have certain feelings doesn't mean they are good. Surrender your feelings to God, ask Him to direct them in a way that honors Him and brings you joy. And hold onto the eternal truth. Because the truth will set us free.