

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...
(Romans 12:2)*

Our culture almost universally hates conformity. *I* should be able to decide who I am, what I look like, and what I do. This is one of the few ideas that crosses all political, economic, and social lines. Sure, it might be framed in different ways (“freedom”, “rights”, “autonomy”, “self-determination”, etc.), but it’s all the same in the end.

There’s an irony, though, isn’t there? With all the talk about our individual choices and desires, cultures still have norms and mores that the majority expects everyone to conform to. If an individual or group doesn’t conform to these, they are ignored at best, usually shunned, and sometimes persecuted. In our modern day, some of these values have become so strongly held that one wrong word, idea, paper, post, or tweet can get a person in hot water quickly – and permanently.

The truth is that, despite periods of relative peace and respite, the Church has always been different than the world. In fact, our Lord reminds us that we *are not of the world*, but that he *chose us out of the world* (John 15:19). On the one hand, we are *in* the world as we go about our daily business interacting with others. On the other hand, we are not *of* the world, in that our lives should look different than people’s in the world. According to Jesus, this means that we live lives of faith, trusting in God and not in money or other people. It means not seeking after what the world seeks, the vain pleasures that are here today and gone tomorrow. Practically, it can look so many different ways. But, the truth is, our *whole* lives should often look different from people’s in the world – not because we think of ourselves as better than others, but because we have been transformed by Christ.

Jesus came to live, to teach, to die, and to rise so that we might have new life. Why would we want to live like those in the world? We shouldn’t! As hard as it is sometimes, our lives *will* look different in *every* way. We’ll be in church while others are traveling for games. We’ll spend our money helping others instead of storing up for ourselves. We’ll treat marriage and children as gifts from God instead of profaning them. We’ll teach our children what is good and godly instead of “letting them decide” (as if that were possible in the first place). We’ll proclaim Christ’s death and resurrection at funerals (with readings, the message, and music!) instead of touting a person’s achievements or simply planning a party instead. We’ll forgive, pray for, and love even our enemies instead of holding a grudge or seeking revenge. Why? Because we have been transformed to be like our Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly did all of this and more for us. All in all, we’ll continue to *discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Romans 12:2). How? Always and only by the Word of God!

-Pastor Squire

“The world seeks to be praised and honored by the mighty yet never once reflects that they are frail and flighty. But what I truly prize above all things is He, my Jesus, He alone. What is the world to me!”

(“What Is the World to Me,” *LSB 730*, v. 2)