

“Nonconformists Swim Against the Tide”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

SCOUT SUNDAY

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Today’s epistle lesson is taken from the book of Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. I’ll be reading from Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message*. So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray.

At the 8:00am worship service the Children’s message illustrated that the world wants to squeeze us into a mold. I squeezed a tube of toothpaste so all the paste was out. After I was finished squeezing, the tube had completely lost its original shaped and looked all messed up. That’s how we look when the world is trying to push us around and convince us what they think we need to do. It’s a continual battle to remember that in the midst of swimming against the tide—God is right beside you. You’re not alone.

There’s pressure to conform to what the majority wants you to do. But being a Scout and a being a believer in God, you’re called to swim against the tide. You

have to know what you believe and maintain who you want to be as a person. If you stand strong against those who want to control you, you are unquestionably, without a doubt, absolutely, and most assuredly a nonconformist.

Take a look at the fish on the front cover. Oh my goodness. This fish no doubt feels like he's swimming against the tide, and he's doing that! He's a fish of a different color. He feels like he's alone sometimes, but throughout his life's journey he's found others who are like himself.

Still, this "Golden Boy" at times feels alone when he makes right decisions that create a positive difference in the world. The majority can judge and criticize him for being a goody two shoes—that'll always happen—so what—naysayers have been around since the beginning of time—nothing new about that. The nonconformity the apostle Paul describes in the verses Jake read go in a specific direction. It's certainly not the typical direction young people might take. It's a direction that comes from within. It's a strength that comes from what they believe, who they are as strong leaders, and it's empowered by God.

Most of us know God isn't interested in us just *looking* like a goody two shoes. External appearance means very little if your heart isn't where it needs to be. God is concerned with our hearts. God wants us to feel a sense of duty in our community and at home with our families. Scouts and Christians are to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. It takes courage to act out these qualities in today's society.

A Scout will demonstrate their courage in tempting situations and refuse to yield. They know their strength comes from God because God is right there beside them and empowers them to do right. The strength provided enables them to resist the tendency for group thinking—thinking that has a negative and harmful effect

on others and themselves. Easy and harmful living doesn't last, and later it yields damaging and destructive effects in everyone that embraces it.

Let me tell you a story. A flock of wild geese were flying south for the winter. One goose looked down and noticed some domestic geese by a pond near a farm. He noticed they had plenty of grain to eat. Life seemed relatively easy for them. So the goose flew down and hung out with these geese until spring. He enjoyed the food that was there. He decided that he'd rejoin his flight of geese when they went north again.

When spring came, he heard them overhead and flew up to join them, but he had grown a bit fat from all of the seed. Flying was difficult, so he decided to spend one more season on the farm and then rejoin the geese on their next winter migration. When the geese flew south the following fall, the goose flapped his wings a little, but he just kept eating his grain. He'd simply lost interest. The moral of the story is this. Any kind of living that seems easy doesn't last. Eventually it'll catch up with you and prove to be destructive. Life is meant to be challenging, so we need stay prepared to work hard and do all we can to not join the crowd that will let go of the disciplines they've learned.

The goose that joined the lazy domestic group lost his physical strength, his independence, and his disciplines. A few days down the road he was turned into soup. Hmmm, I guess all that easy living didn't pay off in the long run. If I could compare the goose story to a Scout, I'd say it's important to not quit Scouting and nurturing your relationship with God. Allow yourself to be nurtured by a group and leaders that are strong and provide good mutual support and accountability. We never want to lose a sense of the need to live out a shared mission for the world to improve it and make a positive difference.

Having participated in Holy Communion today, we gather together as one and receive strength from the living presence of Christ who is in our midst. Christ—who gives strength to go beyond the walls of the church to meet the needs of others. Every time we come together we get stronger to carry out what we know is right in a world that's losing their care and concern for others. Participating in Communion has a cumulative effect and builds strength from within. We do more than remember the death of Christ. We come to recommit ourselves to obedience, love, and devotion. That's exactly what the verses Jake read spell out.

We make sacrifices for others because our lives are an offering to God and to the world around us. We think about the choices we make, because God is helping us make the right choices for our lives and for the lives of others. So, unlike the culture around you, don't allow the lazy group of geese to influence your living and think there's an easy life out there. It doesn't exist.

Don't let that school of fish that's swimming in the wrong direction drag you down to its low level of immaturity. Stay strong in the Lord and allow God to bring the best out of you. Develop a well-formed maturity that continues to embrace God and Scouting values. Let's always remember, a life that's worth living isn't dependent on what you get—it's dependent on what you give.

Let's pray. God of all creation, work in us a continual need to acknowledge that our strength to do right comes from you. Help us to nurture that strength through Scouting and our continued faith in God. Help us lean on the leaders in our lives that hold us accountable for our behavior. Bless the leaders that are here and the ones that aren't, bless our guests, bless the Scouts, and bless this church that we might continue to move in the direction you want us to go. Amen.