

Homiletics and Biblical Studies

Associating with the Humiliated: Paul's Hermeneutic of Transformation in Romans 12:1-16

In Romans 12:16 Paul wrote to the early church encouraging them to associate with the humble or humiliated (*ταπεινους*). This process involved their “transformation by the renewal of their minds” (Rom 12:2). While *ταπεινους* has been traditionally understood to mean humble, its roots in the Hebrew עֲנָוִים suggest that it represents a group who were afflicted and oppressed. In Roman society it was the distinction between the *humiliores* and *honestiores*. Those who were *humiliores* would be those individuals on the margins of society. While the Roman church consisted of diverse ethnic groups, there would have also been economic diversity. Those who rated higher on the social scale would have viewed this challenge, by the Apostle Paul, as promoting unity and maintaining a safe environment. Paul guided the Roman Christians to develop connection through the use of “mental/emotional” (*φρονεῖν*) words, spiritual giftedness and mercy, and relationships with the vulnerable members of the congregation. *This was transformation.*

Those of us serving as pastors and counselors within congregations also have an opportunity to guide congregational members to “associate with the humiliated.” These associations can create safe and sacred spaces, facilitate healing, unity, and mercy. However, faith leaders will have trouble in creating those spaces unless congregants are willing to embrace the *ταπεινους*, and resisting the “conformation to pattern of this world.” Paul’s three steps can help hermeneutically guide congregants to develop empathy, ministry, and relationships with those who feel marginalized in their communities and relationships. Through victims’ stories, hospitality and acceptance, partnering with local agencies, and the power of the Sacred Texts, preaching can offer connection to our vulnerable members in the community as well as those offering hope and healing to others. This diverse level of pastoral care provides a powerful witness to the healing power of the Spirit and the incarnation of Jesus.

Romans 12:1-16

The apostle Paul encouraged the early church to practice unity and harmony with each other. While the Roman Christian community consisted of people from various social backgrounds (Rom.16:1-16) it was Paul’s concern that the faith community work together in their spiritual growth and development.¹ Peter Lampe has offered strong evidence that there were

¹Witherington indicates that Paul is not suggesting that they form a new group but maintain a united but diverse group. Witherington, 280. This includes adaptability, unity, and diversity.

economic differences within the congregations.² In addition to this there would have existed Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians who had not met Paul (and would have been unaware of the Antioch decision concerning circumcision), and Jewish Christians who were recently converted during Paul's mission. However, even though the apostle had not met many of these Christians, he pressed for unity, as he did in all his congregations. One of the ways that Paul encouraged this was to call the wealthy to help those who were less fortunate in society (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 6:18; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 7-8; Gal. 2:10). Paul referred to the less fortunate as ταπεινοίς. This word, עַנְוִיִּם, usually translated humble, was also used to describe those who were poor, vulnerable, oppressed in society, and dependent on others for support.³ Those who are oppressed have only one option in society, forgive and learn to persevere (Luke 6:27-36). Those in positions of power and influence must resist their cultural roles to "lord it over" others by empowering the powerless. Since the oppressed are equated with Jesus, in the Gospels (Matt. 25; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 14:13-14) the church has the potential to learn something from their method of surviving on the margins of their societies. The church also has the opportunity to practice Christ's love by responding to the needs of the weak.

Part of the Roman church's quest for unity would involve encouraging and supporting the weak or oppressed. This would require patience, sharing, hospitality, endurance, blessing those who oppress, mourning, and humility. For this reason Paul called the community to associate with the humiliated (αλλα τοις ταπεινοις συναπαγομενοι, Rom.12:16).⁴ Associating with the oppressed in society gave the church the perspective of powerlessness, patience, endurance, and

²Lampe, 183.

³Poor, afflicted, humble, poverty. *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 776-77.

⁴While Fitzmeyer, 656, and Witherington, suggest that this term may refer to "lowly tasks," Keener indicates that Paul's use of "high mindedness" in this text, would refer to those in a different social class. Keener, 149.

other noble characteristics that are present in the kingdom of God.⁵ Paul challenged the church to practice these virtues among the community (12:9-21).⁶ The early Christians were to be sacrificial (12:1-2), not think highly of themselves (12:3), were to use their gifts to encourage the church (12:4-8), and were to practice a “non-hypocritical love” (12:9).⁷ Paul seems to suggest that a “living sacrifice” (which the ancient hearer would contrast with a “dead sacrifice” or animal sacrifice) was not only their calling but a “logical/rational” one.⁸ While ancient philosophers suggested that sacrifice required the offeror’s pure heart and devotion, Paul reminded them to offer themselves to God (Rom 1:18-31; 6:19).⁹ Paul’s use of four mind words in 12:3 suggests that 12:3ff provides the Roman Christians a pattern to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (12:2).¹⁰ The movement from high thoughts to sensibility is to be displayed in Rom. 12:4-8.¹¹ This can also be accomplished by using the gifts to build up the weak in the community through *acts of ministry* (διακονεω).¹²

⁵Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 22*; Origin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans 5*: 72, 74. “We must not look on the saints as beggars but see them as people who have needs like our own. The practice of hospitality does not simply mean that we should entertain those who come to us. It means also that we should go out and invite others to come in.”

⁶The string of participles, according to Witherington, may reflect the Hebrew and Aramaic expression of rules, community codes, and conducts of behaviors. Witherington, 292. Here Paul may be referring to what “transformation by the renewing of one’s mind” involves.

⁷ The verb ἀνυποκριτος suggests true rather than fake love. “He is demanding a love that, like the love that inspired God’s action in Christ, goes beyond mere words and protestations to embrace the alien and the enemy.” Byrne, 376. Fitzmeyer also compares this to actors on a stage who “portray” Agape. Fitzmeyer, 652-53.

⁸Augustine, *On Romans 71* = seems to suggest that doing good will lead one to repentance.

⁹Keck, 95; Summers, 51-52.

¹⁰ὑπερφρονεῖν, φρονεῖν, and σωφρονεῖν all suggest that Paul may be addressing those who are high minded in society. The Christians were to move from high-mindedness to wisdom. Keener, 144-45; 149. Campbell translates this as “do not be super minded but sober minded...” Campbell, 196.

¹¹Witherington, 292.

¹²Fitzmeyer suggests that this term can mean service or administration of material aid to members of the community. Fitzmeyer, 648. Collins also suggests that the term means to act as a go between in the community. Collins, *Diakonia*, 191, 336; *Are All Christians Ministers?*, 38-39; Bash, 36, 39; and Carter, 268. Clarke believes that Collins is inaccurate in his writing that διακονεῖν means intermediary. Clarke suggests that Paul’s use and Jesus’ actions give διακονεω a servile nature. I am not convinced that Clarke sufficiently argues this point but appreciate his balance in the argument. He indicates that Christian ministry and leadership was different than Greco-Roman leadership and goes to great lengths to show that Paul attempted to use common leadership terms in the Christian community but theologically called the leaders to become servants. Clarke, 233-45.

Paul uses an ancient form of *Paraenesis* to move the reader to appropriate “Christlike” action. At the end of Rom 9-11, he wrote that God’s desire was to “have mercy on all humans...” (Rom 11:32). He followed this verse with a doxology, praising God for this mercy (ἐλεω, Rom 11:33-36) only to continue the next section as an appeal to this “mercy” (ὀκτιρμοῦν, Rom 12:2).¹³ Yet Paul, used a common paraenetic phrase παρακαλεω ουν to motivate the community to respond through mercy, compassion, and the love shown by God.¹⁴ This paraenetic involved three parts. First, they were to be *transformed* by the renewal of their minds to the Kingdom of God, rather than be conformed to the standards of their culture.¹⁵ While Paul elsewhere had written that this age was temporary (1 Cor 1:28; 2:8, 7:31, 13:8) the Empire of Jesus was permanent. The beginning of this transformation developed mentally. In Rom 12:3-4 they renewed their minds through:

- Υπερφρονειν (v3)
- Φρονειν (v3)
- Φρονεν (v4)
- Σωφρονειν (v4)
- Αλληλους φρονουντες (v16)
- Μη τα υψηλα φρουντες (v16)
- Μη γινεσθε φρονιμοι (v16)

Notice the progression downward from v3-4 and v16 onward. This mental process is similar to Phil 2 yet portrays Paul’s challenge to those who needed to embrace the *humiliors*. Their

¹³While Witherington indicates that these two words are not the same, they fit within the word range Paul is using as a Hebraist. Witherington, 284. See also Paul’s use of both words in Rom 9:15. See also Keck, 95.

¹⁴Keck, 95; Karris, 82; Fitzmeyer, 637, 639. “In 12:9–21 Paul offers “paranesis,” a series of loosely fitted exhortations, most of them widely paralleled elsewhere in the ancient world. Although by their nature such exhortations are of general significance, Paul still writes with the Roman believers in mind. In 12:9–13 he urges loving and serving fellow believers; in 12:14–21 he addresses relationships with people more generally, preparing for relationships with the state in 13:1–7. Paul frames 12:9–21 with exhortations to choose “good” rather than evil (12:9, 21); he has already shown that what is “good” is the will of God (12:2), and will continue encouraging them to do “good” in 13:3–4.” Keener, 147.

¹⁵Witherington, 286, and Keener, 144-145, indicate that transformation in the Greek addresses the inner change while conformation deals strictly with outer change.

transformation and development for unity began as a conscious decision to act. They were to choose to be united with their oppressed brothers and sisters.

Second, the Christians *encourage*, παρακαλων, others in the church by using gifts that emphasized social justice (Rom 12:8). Giving to the needs of others (ὁ μεταδιδους ἐν ἁπλοτητι) was an act of charity or alms.¹⁶ The one who leads (προϊσταμενος) indicates protection of the less fortunate.¹⁷ Practicing mercy (ἐλεων) is also a word that is used for alms and gifts to the poor (Matt. 6:2-3). It referred to the mercy of God in this letter (Rom 9:15, 32). “These very qualities of adaptability and self-sacrifice for the sake of the community are precisely what one would expect a rhetor to speak about when the goal is unity, concord, harmony in a fractured or divided community.”¹⁸ The community moves from a “sober mind” to practicing “humility” by serving others, especially those who would have been marginalized.

Finally, the Christians are to *develop relationships* with their brothers and sisters who were part of the *humiliors*. Rom. 12:9-19 provided a list of twenty participles which involve sharing with the oppressed and endurance. Paul called the Christians to acts of mercy by sharing with the ones who were in need (ταις χρειας των ἁγιων κοινωνοθντες). They were to practice hospitality (την φιλοξενιαν) which meant a love for strangers and outsiders. Rather than being

¹⁶“The qualification provided by the attached prepositional phrase ὁ μεταδιδους suggests that giving of alms from one’s own resources is in view.” Byrne, 373. Fitzmeyer cites Job 31:17; Prov. 11:26; Luke 3:11; Eph. 4:28; T. Iss. 7:5; Herm. Vis. 3.9.4 as texts that indicate this word means giving to the poor. Fitzmeyer, 648.

¹⁷“Paul could mean one who provides resources, in the sense of a well-off person who acts as a *patronus* for the less-advantaged. The fact that in the present context this gift occurs between two others denoting ‘social service’ suggest that the latter is what Paul has in mind.” Byrne, 374. The verb προϊστημι also has a meaning in Greek literature that means helping the less fortunate. It also suggested that the leader was a protector. Isocrates was the first to use προϊσταμενος as protector in the fifth-century BCE. He wrote that the Athenian aliens were judged by the protector or patron that they chose. The leader also had the responsibility to protect outcasts in the city (Isocrates *De Pac.* 53:6). Plato mentioned that the leader of democracy was the protector προϊσταμενος of the city (*Resp.* 565.c.9). In the fourth-century Menander also wrote that each Athenian citizen acted as protectors over a resident alien. This is found in a fragment from one of his plays for Perinthias (Menander *Perinthiae Fragmenta Aliunde Nota* 1:1). In the first-century BCE Dionysius used the term for patrons among the Romans (*Antiq. Rom.* 2:11:1.7).

¹⁸Witherington, 282.

high minded (υψηλα φρονοθντες) they were to associate with the vulnerable (τοις ταπεινους συναπαγομενοι).¹⁹ This suggests that the early Christians, in their service to the oppressed, continue to develop relationships with their brothers and sisters who were in the lower margins of society.

As he had insisted at the start...the key to this is that people do not “think haughty thoughts”...that is, assess themselves more highly than the reality warrants. The antidote for this divisive tendency is to associate with the lowly (τοις ταπεινους συναπαγομενοι), that is, with the poor and disadvantaged, who in worldly terms are of no value but who, according to the gospel, have supreme value in the sight of God.²⁰

Setting, Location, and Personality

Evidence suggests that the Roman church included upper class Romans, slaves, and poor Gentiles and Jews.²¹ This mixed group provided a valuable opportunity for the upper class to learn from their humble brothers and sisters in the faith. If Juvenal is correct, Romans hated Jews, especially those who were considered “lower class,” the artisans and merchants in this massive city.²² Those who worked with their hands were viewed as doing menial labor, unbefitting to a wealthy Roman elite. In addition to this, many of the Pauline congregations were led and hosted by those who existed barely above the subsistence line.²³ Tensions would have been common within the Roman congregation both ethnically and economically.

¹⁹In view of *τοις ταπεινους συναπαγομενοι* it could mean “give yourselves to lowly tasks.” Fitzmeyer, 656. In light of the context I still believe that the Christians are being called to relationship with the oppressed rather than occupational choices. “The adjective could, however, be neuter (giving the sense ‘but adopt humble thoughts’), which would give a tighter correspondence with the neuter plural *ταπεινους* in the previous phrase. But *ταπεινους* normally has a personal reference in biblical Greek.” Byrne, 380.

²⁰Ibid., 378.

²¹Lampe, 183.

²²Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106.

²³Friessen, 367.

Acts 20:1-4 suggests that Paul wrote the letter to the Roman Christians during his three month stay at Corinth, before his final visit to the Macedonian congregations and his trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-4). In his letter to the Roman Christians he wrote that he had planned to visit Jerusalem then pass through Rome on his way to Spain (Rom 1:11-17, 15:23-33). According to Acts 21-28 his plans were not the Lord's plans and we have little information concerning his visit to Rome (Acts 28).

It is important that in Romans 16 he indicated connection with the congregation. Phoebe, a *διακονο* or administrator/ambassador for the Corinthian church, had been sent to deliver Paul's letter and share his welcome. Paul offered greetings to those in his ministry such as Priscilla and Aquilla (who would have recently returned from Corinth, Rom 16:3), Epenetus (an Asian convert at Ephesus, 16:5), Mary, Andronicus, and Junias (who have been with Paul in his Macedonian ministry, 16:6-7), and Ampliatus, Urbanus, and Apelles (16:8-10). These individuals had a personal relationship with Paul and possibly comprised one of the house church communities (16:5). Paul also offered indications of relationships with the remaining members including Rufus, who may have been the son of Simeon who had carried Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21; Rom 16:13), and his mother.

Paul personally knew some within the Roman Christian community. Whether this group represents the majority of the congregation or a large group within the church is hard to tell. However, with the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius and the return of them through Nero, one suggestion among scholars is that tension in the congregation had developed between those Jews who had left and those Gentiles remaining.²⁴

²⁴Seutonius, *Claudius*, 25.

The evidence may suggest that Paul's letter was delivered shortly after a return or influx of Jews who had been expelled. Some, as Priscilla, Aquilla, Epenetus, and the rest of Paul's team might suggest, would have been fairly new Jewish Christian converts. Another group (possibly present at Pentecost, Acts 2:10) would have been a more original Jewish Christian community, although not aware of the doctrinal views of Acts 15 and the inclusion of Gentiles. It is possible that Gentiles had become Christian but this might be more likely through Paul's team rather than the earlier founders of the congregation. As we read in Acts and the Diaspora, tensions would have existed between Gentiles, Gentile inclusive Christian Jews, and non-inclusive Christian Jews. Some, not knowing the development of the Antioch decision (Acts 15-16), would still struggle with including Gentiles without following Torah, circumcision, or dietary restrictions.

For Paul the concern was not only promoting unity within the congregations, but forming a united, diverse, and healthy congregation. Paul similarly taught unity within the Asian, Syrian, Greek, and Roman churches through *paraenesis*, promoting unity, using gifts that benefit others, and mutuality or self-sacrifice for the community.²⁵ It would seem likely, if Paul wrote many of his letters during his 3 month stay in Corinth (Acts 20:1-4), that these issues were not only fresh on his mind, but common in all of his churches. Likewise Paul called the Roman Christian community to transformation, practicing gifts, and developing relationships within the diverse body of believers.

Preaching and Pastoring Today

One of the difficult tasks that pastors, ministers, and/or preachers experience involves motivating congregants to action. Due to a highly consumeristic society, labeled

²⁵Fitzmeyer, 638; Karris, 82; Witherington, 281.

McDonaldization by John Drane,²⁶ many members and visitors to congregations attend to “observe” the sermon, which has become an important part of the worship service. A recent Gallup pole indicates that the sermon plays a highly important part of the worship and why people choose a congregation.²⁷ Witnessing or experiencing a sermon places a tremendous emphasis on why people come to a church, with high expectations that the proclamation powerfully touch individuals personally. While Long indicated that the preacher as “witness” offers a powerful message by bringing the hearer to the text, we find ourselves struggling to move the hearers toward spiritual growth.²⁸ Craddock has written that our preaching extends beyond the pulpit as a “pastoral presence.”²⁹ Tisdale suggested that we “exegete” our congregations through various methods of study, context, and interviews yet with the rise of larger congregations that becomes an overwhelming task.³⁰ Tisdale also wrote that prophetic preaching attempts to work with the congregation, rather than in opposition to it, however with a culture that resists and distrusts leadership this becomes even more difficult.³¹

The pressure also seems to fall on the preacher as witness to motivate congregations to become disciples and followers of Jesus. Even more difficult is the task of leading a congregation whose busy schedules allow only once per month or twice per month weekly attendance.³² How can we motivate our people to not only listen to the message, but be persuaded to act? How will we as leaders, lead diverse people without forcing an agenda but through the simple form of paraenetic? Can we “appeal” to the mercy of God to motivate others.

²⁶Drane, 4-5.

²⁷Miltmore, April 17, 2017.

²⁸Long, 55.

²⁹Craddock, 39-40.

³⁰Tisdale, *Preaching*, 64; and *Prophetic*, 44-54.

³¹*Ibid.*, 54.

³²Drane, 43.

Agape

Paul's letter to the Roman Christians sought to motivate people to strive for unity. He challenged a congregation which consisted of converted Romans, immigrant Jews, and Jewish Christians who had accompanied Paul while on the mission field. These diverse perspectives of Torah and Gospel were also ethnically and socially diverse. Today, we experience diversity within our congregations. At Agape, we have worked to understand community from diverse denominational perspectives, ethnicities, and social classifications. What does it mean to be a community that reflects the mercies and compassion of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? How can I/we as leaders move diverse groups from sermons, class teaching, or mentoring in smaller groups?

As a community we have become active in community agencies that address gendered violence, houselessness, trafficking, and addiction recovery. Our congregation has not only been open to those on the streets and others in prostitution on Sunday mornings, but they have intentionally practiced serving and developing relationships with many of those "marginalized" in our city. Through writing, teaching, preaching, public speaking or providing trainings, or sharing stories our congregation has developed empathy for those who are vulnerable in our communities. It has also challenged us to confront power structures and dynamics in our community. There has been tension between the temptation to be conformed by a consumeristic society and transformed by renewing our minds toward the Gospel of Jesus.

First, *renewal of the mind* is a necessary practice for those in our faith communities. As Paul encouraged the congregation to move from "supermindedness" to "sobermindedness"

homileticians can guide congregants to a similar journey.³³ I have done this through victim's testimonies with Bible college students, members in our current church plant, and writing.³⁴ In addition to this prophetic preaching engages the hearer to sympathize and empathize with those suffering injustice, marginalization, and oppression. As Resner states, "Preaching that takes justice as a starting point recognizes that preaching and its relationship to the Bible are a dynamic process."³⁵ Prophets were not those who "predicted the future," but were those "under assignment" and "witnesses to the injustices" in their own land.³⁶ The preaching/pastor has an opportunity to prophetically call the hearer and our congregations through stories, passion, and modern Paraenesis to renew their minds. Acknowledging that the poor are poor because of a system that is not fair requires all of us to confront this injustice.

Righteousness expressed in justice thus becomes 'the indispensable qualification for worship—no justice, no acceptable public worship'... The functional criterion of a just society is found in the treatment of the poor and weak (Is 3:14-15).³⁷

Resistance and disruption refer to our Christian calling to confront, just as Jesus did, that which denies human well-being and community.³⁸

³³Keener, 147.

³⁴For more on creating empathy and motivating hearers through victim's testimonies see my articles "Associating with the Humiliated," along with the chapters concerning "Victim's Testimonies." The results from the articles suggest that these stories move the students to engage the text and develop empathy.

³⁵Resner, 13.

³⁶Miller, 78; Wogman, 3-4. "The prophets were real live human beings existing in real concrete social circumstances. They were adults...capable of seeing the world in adult ways, critical and discerning, informed by deep memory from which they did not depart. The strangeness of these prophets, now remembered and given to us through a complicated editorial process, is that they did not...see the world in the same way as most of their contemporaries, especially the power elite. The latter had long since decided that the old traditions of doxology, narrative, and commandment were nice for 'little children' but had nothing at all to do with the 'real world,' for the 'real world' was defined apart from God and shaped by credit, debt, mortgage, interest, surplus, and profits, without any disruptive theological footnote." Brueggemann, 71.

³⁷Conn and Ortiz, 110.

³⁸Stivers, 7. "Key for the Christian is recognizing how our constructed ideologies can justify oppression and violence."

In a culture steeped in consumerism, to which many of our people are conforming, our messages and ministries must guide people to feel and be united to those in need and marginalized in our culture.

Second, the practice of mercy and compassion is a needed ministry in today's congregations. While many in our congregations carry empathy toward the plight of the modern *ταπεινοίς*, we must nudge them to put their faith and mercy to practice. A generation simply clicking "like" on Facebook to DAPL and assuming it is active participation needs a strong Paraenesis. This promotes the difficult work of change within the Empire of Jesus. Each congregation should feel as a form of rebellion, change, and protest toward a consumeristic Empire by what they practice.³⁹ In our work with domestic abuse, houselessness, and trafficking we have found connections and developed relationships with many agencies. Our people at Agape have been nudged out of their comfort zones (their words) to participate with other agencies to provide relief, support, and a house to those who are most vulnerable in our communities. As our people at Sunday worship continue to practice open community, open arms, and open hearts, the need to excel in "mercy spiritual gifts" become evident. This practice moves members from an American mindset that blames the poor for their own plight.⁴⁰

The American Dream, as Smalley suggests, was a description of the ideal life of the thriving American which included stable employment, a house, car, family, and time of prosperity. However, many were not able to experience this "Dream" as Laura Stivers indicated:

³⁹Wogman, 6.

⁴⁰"In Jesus' moral universe the disqualified get the lion's share of his compassionate attention. How is it, then, that we who seek to aid the poor still harbor notions of the deserving or undeserving poor? What have we—we who dare to bear Christ's name in the world—become?" Coats, 155. See also McMickle, 5; Smalley, *The Rich and the Rest of Us*, location 185.

Clearly, the economic crisis that began in 2008 has increased the number of people who are homeless. Multiple economic and social factors have precipitated a steady decline over the last thirty years in the standard of living of poor and working-class people (and even a substantial number of middle-class people). The proverbial American Dream is out of reach for increasing numbers of Americans as job security has become more tenuous, pay and benefits have decreased, and costs of basic goods like housing and healthcare have risen exponentially. While not all people end up homeless, many are a paycheck away from ending up on their friends' or families' couches.⁴¹

What once was considered the American Dream, became more of a nightmare to those who were unable to achieve a career, house, and property. With the economic crisis of 2007, many who were attempting to attain this “Dream” found themselves facing poverty, eviction, and in some cases, houselessness. With the current definition of “houselessness” including transitory lifestyles, camping, and “couch surfing,” the number of houseless increases dramatically.

When the rich and the poor compete for housing on the open market, the poor don't stand a chance. The rich can always outbid them, buy up their tenements or trailer parks, and replace them with condos, McMansions, golf courses, or whatever they like. Since the rich have become more numerous, thanks largely to rising stock prices and executive salaries, the poor have necessarily been forced into housing that is more expensive, more dilapidated, or more distant from their places of work.⁴²

Involvement in ministries of compassion, mercy, and hospitality also builds trust and love within a community. In our efforts to build new houseless camps, aid domestic violence victims and children, and provide support for county and state service providers it has been important to help in the methods that they suggest. Members also become connected and serve or partner with many from these agencies to not only provide aid but become direct providers themselves. This also helps members to not only identify with the struggles of those on the margins of society, but to experience the injustices.

⁴¹Stivers, *Disrupting Homelessness*, 2.

⁴²Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 199.

Finally, *developing relationships* with those considered “oppressed” offers powerful witness to the grace and mercy of God. As Brown indicates, “Being concerned for the working poor may not seem to be such a big deal for some. But it should be, because many of the working poor look like you and me. Many of our own children are living in poverty.”⁴³ Recognizing the face of oppression and poverty happens when we develop relationships with others. Paul describes it as “associating with the humiliated.” Campbell indicates that this unity and association confronts our cultural values and the way our world views those on the margins of society. “The church’s resistance to the powers, in fact, begins with its own communal practices. Such resistance does not primarily involve a set of ethical norms or moral pronouncements or decision-making processes but rather a specific people who practice a concrete alternative to the ways of death in the world.”⁴⁴ Campbell also suggests that this emotional connection provokes us to respond.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Preaching is a difficult task for the modern congregation. Even more, our increased diversity within these congregations and our ministry to those on the margins will not only increase anxiety and tension among our people, but make proclamation a difficult task. However, Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians offers us opportunities to guide our people to transformation, rather than conformation by our cultural standards. This transformation offers grace and mercy in unity, while practicing patience and allowing for diversity. A threefold process of “mental humility,” the practice of mercy giftedness among the congregation, and

⁴³Brown, 19.

⁴⁴Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 133.

⁴⁵Campbell, *Word on the Street*, 18.

developing relationships with those on the margins of our society not only can promote peace and harmony—it can transform us to be people, like our God, of mercy.

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