

THE FUNCTION OF THE MIND

Romans 12:2c

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Do you remember what the space shuttle is? It is that kind of airplane that they have made to send into space, which will be retrievable.

Let's imagine that you are one of the ones chosen to ride the space shuttle. We all go down to Cape Kennedy to see you off. You and two others get into the space shuttle. The moment comes when all the rocket engines fire perfectly and she takes off beautifully. Everything seems to be going well, and then suddenly you completely lose control of the guidance system. Your connection with the ground control is broken and you start winging your way out to the very edge of our solar system, and then on into limitless space.

Now what do you think about at that moment? First you think, "How much food have we? How long am I going to last?" Then you think, "Does anybody know where we are? Nobody knows we are even here." Then, can you imagine the conversation beginning among the three of you? You express the concern, "How long will the food last?" and one of the others in the spacecraft says: "Don't worry about that. I have a lot of hamburgers stashed away in my closet. I will make a deal with you. If you clean my shoes every morning I will give you a hamburger to see you through the day. Ok?" Your eyes kind of glaze over and you wonder, "Did I hear right or is that guy bonkers?" Then you say to him, "Don't be dumb? I'm concerned about what happens after your food runs out," and he replies, "Don't think about that. Let's draw up a job contract here so that you will clean my shoes every morning and I'll give you a hamburger for your troubles.

You know that as you do that, as you get more and more committed to this job, you will forget those big universal questions you have about what will happen when my food runs out. In fact, if you shine them especially well so that I can see my face in them, I will give you a half hamburger bonus." Your mind just boggles; you don't know what to make of the guy. You yell in exasperation, "Don't be dumb! Don't you realize that nobody knows we are here? Nobody knows where we are!!"

Then the other guy says, "I know you are here. You mean something to me. Just to show you how much you mean to me, I'm going to run a competition between you two each day and the one that wins will get an empty milk carton. That shows you how important you are." You look at the computer, but it is built into the wall; otherwise you would haul it out and throw it at him. Your mind almost collapses under the strain. You begin to realize, "Wait a minute. We are losing touch with reality here. These guys are beginning to forget where we are."

Yet that Walt Disney-type cartoon describes exactly our situation here on spacecraft Earth. Because what you and I really want to know is, where are we going to get the sustenance we need not only this side of the grave, but the other side too? That is in the back of all our minds. Even before the mushroom cloud appears, it is in the back of our minds. Because we are downright sensible and commonsensical people. What we all know we need is that somebody--not just somebody who knows we are here, not some idiot that is going to play milk-carton games with us--we need to know that whoever made this whole thing or whoever owns it all, that he knows we are here. He sets some value on us.

We know that we are no different from that space shuttle. It is just that our space shuttle is a bit bigger. It is still in the same situation exactly. We know that what we need is to be sure that

whoever made this whole thing is really able to provide for our existence, does care about us and does value us in some way. In fact, he really loves us,

We know that what we need is the love of the Creator of the universe. Loved ones, we don't have just one little shoe-cleaning job going in this spacecraft. We don't simply have one little milk-carton competition going. We have millions of those things, all of them trying to distract you and me from the real issue, from the real things we are concerned about.

We have a huge supernatural organization operating inside this world that is bent on trying to distract you and me from those big issues that we are really concerned about. It tries to distract us from them by jobs, gold watches on retirement, promotions, keys of the executive washroom, a letter when we are at college. We have millions of operations going like that to persuade us that somebody will provide food and shelter and clothing for us and that other people do think something of us.

All the time, deep down in the quietness of our own bedrooms, many of us feel like screaming, "I don't care who likes me or who doesn't like me! I don't care who esteems me or who gives me a medal. I don't care really about whether the social security system keeps operating or whether I lose my job. My care is deeper than that. I know that I need to know that beyond all that, there is somebody who notices me and cares about whether I exist or not."

Loved ones, what we said last Sunday about the whole supernatural organization of little rewards and jobs that are supposed to give us money--that whole cosmos that it is called in the Greek--that whole orderly arrangement that Jesus says is operated by the world rulers of this present darkness.

This whole organization has such a grip on many of us that we are becoming more and more like little performing seals trying to gain the esteem of this boss, the respect of this peer and trying to make sure of this share or stock or job. Deep down, you know all we are doing is distracting ourselves. Like the guy who offered us the shoe-cleaning job in the space shuttle, it is just distracting us from the fact that we know this isn't the security that we need. This isn't the thing that will last at all.

I think many of us will admit that our minds have come to almost the same place of bewilderment as the example we used in the space shuttle. Many of our minds are so bewildered by this and so preoccupied with trying to make another little shekel from our job or trying to get another job that is more secure than this one -- many of us are so involved in trying to jump the right hurdles and the right hoops for our friends to like us, that our minds are becoming incapable of realizing that this isn't what it is at all. This whole thing is a circus; it is a game. We are actually infinitesimally small little specks on a spacecraft zooming through limitless, infinite miles of space.

What we really need is to know that somebody knows that we are here and cares about us. But really, it is difficult, isn't it? What we have talked about is so startling because we have real trouble thinking in those terms, haven't we? We live as if Minneapolis is eternal. We live as if the Crystal Court is eternal. We live as if the 3M Corporation is heaven. We live as if Campus Church is forever. We live as if our wives' evaluation of us is everything in the universe. The tragedy is we are becoming so real about these milk-carton games and these shoe-cleaning jobs that we are getting to the point where we can't even conceive of what reality is.

Anthony Newley [British actor and singer] had a show which was entitled "Stop The World, I Want To Get Off!", and don't you feel like that at times? Your mind is so attached to this little spacecraft and you have become so brain-washed by these little games that go on inside it that you think, "The only way to get into reality is to somehow get off and get into space and there let God and me deal with each other. Somehow I must get out of this pretending game that I'm involved in."

Of course it is very difficult. Even the astronauts that were off didn't achieve that when they came down. It is very difficult to detach your mind from this kind of circus that we are involved in. Do you realize that is why we feel so neurotic times? This is probably the reason for a lot of the old falling dreams. It is probably a reason for a lot of our insecurity, even those of us who have money and jobs. We know fine well that deep, deep down where it counts, that isn't what we are looking for. Yet our minds are so attached to this thing that we don't know how to get clear.

Loved ones, there is a way to get clear. It is obviously not achieved by leaving the earth physically because the astronauts did that and came back in and presumably most of them are much the same as we are. They try not to worry about their jobs, but they still worry about them as if they were their eternal destiny, just like you and me. They try not to worry about what their neighbors think of them, but they worry just as many of us do, as if their neighbors were the gods of the whole universe and their eternal destiny hung on what they thought of us. We know it is wrong, we know it is stupid, but we keep on doing it.

The astronauts are in the same situation. Somehow our whole mental attitude, our whole emotional attitude, everything inside that concerns our attitude to things, has to be parted from this world environment. That is what has to happen. The eastern religions try to do that in transcendentalism; they are trying to transcend. Actually, they can never get away from it. They annihilate the activity of the mind and the emotions but they are unable to get away from it.

The truth is there is only one person who can actually get us away from it, and that is the person who put us here. Do you see that is what the Calvary thing is all about? The cross is the only spaceship, the only space shot, the only space shuttle that can actually take us outside the earth's spiritual atmosphere. That is actually what happened in Jesus.

That is why Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ." [Galatians 2:20] "...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." [Galatians 6:14] Actually it happened to each one of you. If you say, "Why then do I have the troubles that you describe?" Well, because you yourself don't believe it. What you need is to be transformed inside so that you can see things as they really are, so that you are at last free to stop playing the games. We all have our jobs to do, by all means even to engage in athletic competition, but not to regard them any longer as your very *raison d'être*—your reason of your existence. You can be free because God has broken those fetters that bind you to those things.

If you say, "How does it become real?" It is in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." How? By the renewal of your mind. Your mind is pretty important. It determines your behavior in the light of what it believes reality to be. Your mind guides all the activity of your body in the light of where it believes your needs will be fulfilled.

If I say to you this morning, "Don't get alarmed, but carbon monoxide has accidentally been released in the circulation system of this building and at the moment is flowing into this auditorium." Your

mind, if it believes that, directs you to hold your breath until you get out that door. Now, similarly, if I say to you, "It's okay, it is all clear and this air is clean and you can breathe it", your mind has to decide, "Is it true?" Then it directs your body to begin breathing in what it believes is clean air. In other words, your mind is the one that determines where your needs are fulfilled, and it directs your behavior in the light of that.

That is why the first step in the renewal of the mind is you changing your mind. Repentance in the New Testament is from a Greek word, "metanoia". "Meta" has the sense of turning and "noia" is from mind. Repentance in Greek actually means, you change your whole mind. Loved ones, that is the first step this morning for you in beginning to experience the complete remaking that took place in your personality in Jesus on Calvary. Many of you wonder, "You talk about this cosmic miracle; how does that become real in me today?" First, by changing your whole mind about where your needs are fulfilled. You work out "What do I need? Do I need the approval of my teacher? Do I need the flattery or the praise of my friends, or is what I'm really after a sense that the Maker of the universe values me and esteems me?" Then you direct your behavior in the light of that.

It is the same with your job. You decide, "Do I need this job to supply me with money so that I can eat until I die, or do I need an assurance that there is somebody out there who can actually continue to enable me to exist after I die?" Then you stop looking to your job as anything more than it is -- a way to contribute to this world, a way to bring it more into God's order. You stop looking at it as the supply of your food, shelter and clothing, and you begin to look to this Creator of the universe. That is the first step in the renewal of your mind.

You can decide this morning, "All right, what you have said is true. I do see that this is little better than a spaceship. I do agree with you. I'm playing milk-carton games and shoe-cleaning games in this spaceship. I agree with you it doesn't bear any relationship to reality; a lot of these people that I'm cleaning the shoes for will be dead before me and they won't be able to do anything for me. As far as people thinking well of me, I can see how long that lasts. Some of them will be dead before I'm dead, and what good will their thinking well of me be then? Yes, I agree with you that what I do need is to know that the Maker of all this that I see around me really knows me. Now I'm going to start asking him to come through to me and to communicate to me." Loved ones, that is the first step.

You may say, "Oh, that is too easy!" No! First of all, you have to change that old mind of yours. By all means, let's continue to do our jobs, let's continue to be nice to each other, to praise each other and to love each other, but let's stop pretending that is really what we need. Let's quietly, in our hearts, acknowledge, "God of the universe, what I need to know is that you know I'm here. You do have my number; You do know who I am. Lord God, will you show me that you do?"

Loved ones, when you take that little step an absolute horde of spirits that you cannot even identify, that show themselves as heavy weights on your shoulders or weights in your heart, will fall from you. Because one of the things that Jesus did for you was, he triumphed over the powers of evil. He triumphed over them and the moment you believe that, those powers begin to fall from you.

Your mind is important. But it is not only what it believes, because God knows fine well if you really believe a thing, you direct your life and behavior in accordance with that belief. So don't think, "Yes, if I just think the way he said, it will work." No! The mind directs the life in the light of what it believes is reality, and God knows that. It really means that we begin to do what the apostles did.

Paul describes the way the apostles lived in I Thessalonians 2:3-6: "For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ."

They didn't seek glory from men; they didn't engage in deception and guile so that other people would think better of them than was really true. They didn't involve themselves with flattery to get somebody to like them and approve of them. They didn't engage in uncleanness or things that they didn't really agree with just to make everybody think they were one of the guys. They believed that what they needed was God thinking well of them, and so they simply stopped behaving like silly little performing seals trying to please everybody. They began to run their lives in order to please their Maker.

That is the beginning. We will be talking in coming Sundays about other things that the renewal of the mind involves, but the first big step is--change your mind about the way you are living your life.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, most of us feel the same about this. We do see what is really true, what we need deep down is a sense, whoever you are, you who made this whole thing and own it that you actually love us and you know us.

Lord, we know that is why we have an empty feeling at the pit of our stomachs so often, even at the moment of triumph, even when we have got a new job, just got tenure or somebody has said something nice about us, still we feel there is something more we need. Lord, we know that.

Lord, we know we need to take the first step before you give us the assurance that you know us and love us. You intend us to take the first step -- to change our minds and change the whole direction of our lives. We need to change the whole focus of our behavior from pleasing people and trying to get more money to pleasing you and starting to be concerned about what you put us here to do.

Lord, we see if we change our minds and begin to direct our behavior towards you and towards pleasing you and knowing you know us, you will give us a sense of your love and approval by a miracle. Lord, we see we cannot love God and Mammon -- we cannot love the world and love you. We cannot have the world's approval and security at the same time as we have your approval and security. You require us, your children, to turn from the wrong and to turn for the right before you give us any peace.

So, Lord, those of us who are ready to make that change here this morning, we would do it simply now -- simply by an act of faith. We would say, "Lord, God we give ourselves to you. We are going to direct our behavior to please you and have your approval. We are going to trust you Lord that when the moment of death comes, you will sustain us and you will continue to enable us to exist." Lord, we commit ourselves to you now and ask you to send the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts so that we may know what to do next this day.

We ask these things in his name and for his sake.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with each of us. Amen.