

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

I think Erika Olvey has given up on me being her teammate if she ever gets on *Wheel of Fortune's* Friend Week. We often watch this game show together and I'm not good at it because I get into mindsets. The other night, as the letters in the puzzle were revealed, I thought the "thing" was going to be a "clean sweep." But then a contestant spun the wheel and asked for a "w" and Vanna White just stood there because there was no "w." Well, without a "w," the answer obviously couldn't be clean sweep. But just seconds later, I continued to try to solve the puzzle. "Clean sheet", "clean sheep", "clean sweep", "Hey, it could be "clean sweep" and Erika exclaimed, "There is no 'w.' Pat just said there's no 'w.' The second word can't be 'sweep' if there's no 'w.'" Even though I learned moments before that there was no "w" in the puzzle, I couldn't get past my mind set that the answer was "clean sweep." Indeed, what my mind needed in that moment was a clean sweep.

Mindsets are powerful. Many years ago, I was in a mindset that I couldn't lose weight. I had tried a few times and failed and I figured that I was destined to be over weight. But then I got the results of a blood test showing that my cholesterol was dangerously high. In that moment, my mindset changed from thinking that I couldn't lose weight to knowing that I had to lose weight to help avoid a heart attack or stroke. Over the course of the next six months, I lost 20 pounds and by the following year, my cholesterol had dropped 65 points. Mindsets are powerful.

And the Apostle Paul knew this. As one of Christ's earliest missionaries, he slammed up against people's mindsets over and over again. In his letter to the church in Rome, he confronts a mindset that was common in early Christians. They were caught in the mindset that they would be saved by following the laws of God as set out in the Jewish law. And is it any wonder—they had been taught this law since their births, the law of Moses ran in their blood. Following the law of God in order to be saved by God was their mindset. But Paul, Paul is trying desperately to change this mindset. Paul reminds the early Christians that they are saved by grace and grace alone. Their salvation does not depend on following laws or obeying rules. But, this is a hard truth for them to get their minds wrapped around and they revert to their old ways over and over again. Any of us who have "old ways" certainly know how hard it can be to leave them behind to try something new. Geez, Louise, I couldn't even get it through my skull that there was no "w." Imagine how hard it would be to get out of a mindset that had been shaped and molded among your people for 1400 years!

And yet, this is exactly what Paul is attempting to do with the church in Rome. In this passage he's trying to convince them of three things. ONE, God is near. "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." The word—God—is not in a temple, is not only in some far off place called heaven, but near—God is near, in your mouth and in your heart. TWO, confess this reality to yourselves. You need to actually say it, "Jesus is Lord." Not the law, not the emperor, not the leaders of the temple—but Jesus, Jesus is Lord. And THREE, God raised Jesus from the dead—and, as a result—if God raised Jesus from the dead then surely God will do the same for you. Paul reassures that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Paul is trying desperately to change mindsets. And he knows that one of the best ways to do it is not for him to tell the Romans something, but rather for the Romans to tell themselves something. "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

Two thousand years ago, Paul did what contemporary cognitive behavior therapists do today—he realized the power of, forgive me for using a pop psychology term in a sermon—but he realizes the power of self-talk. This form of personal transformation was spoofed and popularized by Al Franken in his role as Stewart Smalley on *Saturday Night Live* when, in mimicking the positive self-talk approach to behavior modification, he looked at

himself in a mirror and—come on, say it with me—he looked at himself in the mirror and said “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and dog-gone it, people like me.”

And all joking aside, there is a lot of truth in this. Whatever thoughts and mindsets are germinating in our inside determine what actions we generate on the outside. And Paul, Paul just wanted the Romans to be germinating ideas on the inside that led to the generation of the Christian faith on the outside.

This reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans about changing their mindsets is a fine way to mark this first Sunday in Lent, a season that is ripe for changing mindsets. Generally, our minds are set on the mindsets, milestones and matters of this world—of this life. But Lent, as it starts with Ash Wednesday and the reminder that “from dust we have come and to dust we shall return,” Lent is a time to reset our minds—to refocus on the things of the God who is near, the words that is in our mouths and in our hearts. It is a time for us to proclaim, to confess with our mouths that “Jesus is Lord.” And, if Jesus is Lord, that means that all of the other things we allow to become Lord of our lives, all of the other things that we get into the mindset of thinking are important—if Jesus is Lord of our life—then none of these other things are. Lent is a time to be intentional about talking ourselves into this alternate reality—to get out of the mindset of setting our minds on the matters and concerns that so often plague and distract us and, in confessing with our mouths that “Jesus is Lord” opening our minds to new realities and ways of living.

There is a small group of monks living in a community in France who regularly reshape their realities to more accurately reflect the truth that “the word is near, it is in their mouths and in their hearts.” These monks are trained to—before taking action—they are trained to say to themselves “this I do in the name of the Lord.” “This I do in the name of the Lord” is the thought that is regularly generated in their heads and in their hearts. Before they work their gardens—before they even lift a spade—“this I do in the name of the Lord.” Before they sit down for dinner—“this I do in the name of the Lord.” Before they buy anything, “this I do in the name of the Lord.” Before they confront a conflict, “this I do in the name of the Lord.” Before they meet a stranger, “this I do in the name of the Lord.” The word is near them—it is in their mouths and in their hearts. They are in the mindset of constantly keeping their mind’s set on God.

And I can’t help but wonder how letting this thought germinate in our hearts—that all we do we do in the name of the Lord—what kinds of behavior would such a thought generate in our own lives? I remember that after I told this story about the monks in a meeting at a church I once served, one of the women who was there sent me an email about 2 weeks later saying how annoying it was that, because she was trying to implement this practice in her own life, she could not say “this I do in the name of the Lord” and then throw the empty toilet paper tube in the bathroom trash. Rather, after saying “this I do in the name of the Lord” she felt compelled to take the empty toilet paper tube all the way out to the recycling container in the garage because she knew that it was better for God’s good earth to recycle that tube than it was for her to throw it away! Her example reveals the power of these words—the power and the simplicity. It’s not like changing our mindsets to focus on the things of God require us to give up everything we have in order to become like Mother Theresa. No, changing our mindset to focus on God, to germinate on the things of God, simply means that the behaviors, words, and actions we generate will reveal glimpses of the kingdom of God. For instance, what would happen if, before you pick up the phone, you proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” What would happen if, before you sit down for a meeting, you proclaim, not out loud but to yourself, “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” I wonder what would I refrain from eating if, before I pick up my fork I proclaim “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” What would happen if an addict, before opening the next pack, or rolling the next joint, or opening the next bottle—What would happen if, before any of these things the addict proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” What would happen if, before I opened my mouth to speak to my child I proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” What would happen if, before you put the key in the ignition you proclaimed, “Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord.” Can you even imagine? Can you even imagine how your life would change—how our lives would change—how the WORLD would change if we often and regularly, intentionally and faithfully, proclaimed

“Jesus is Lord” and “This I do in the name of the Lord” before we said or did anything? What kind of a reality would that practice generate? I’m not sure, but I can’t help but think that it would be a whole lot better than the reality in which we’re now living. Such behavior would certainly change our mindsets and have the power to change a whole lot of minds. Such behavior would reveal that God is indeed near and people would know it because of what would be in our mouths and in our hearts.

The mindset we germinate is the reality we generate. During Lent we let our old, negative mindsets die. Our mindsets of negativity, self-doubt, paranoia, suspicion, greed, self-loathing, distrust, competition, acquisition, worldly success—these mindsets have no place in the kingdom of God where Jesus is Lord and all we do we do in the name of the Lord. Thanks be to God.