

**Spring Lake Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway**  
**March 9, 2008**

Romans 8:6-11

*<sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

*<sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.*

## **Change the World Through Me**

It is so easy to say the two words that end all hope: "I can't!" Enter the room of a child whose toys are strewn about and you will hear those terrified words. "But Mom, I Can't clean my room!" The words "I Can't" are debilitating and cause for frustration in those who are teaching. What Math teacher hasn't heard the words when teaching variables in Algebra or proofs in Geometry? "I just can't do it!" And with the spoken word, the learner has tuned out the potential for understanding, for learning, for growing. I was a late bloomer and did not learn to ride my bike until I was in the fourth grade. I repeated to my father, as my children have repeated to me, "But I can't!" And in saying so, I determined my own reality. There was no trying, no effort, once those words were spoken. And the bike returned to the garage while tears rolled down my face.

The two words are spoken just as frequently in hospitals and nursing homes. I'm sure Joan Esler hears them frequently as a home health nurse. "I can't do these exercises." "I can't get up and walk." "I can't eat." "I can't bathe." And when times are tough in this difficult economic time, the words are spoken in painful situations. "I can't pay my bills." "I can't get out of debt." "I can't afford to see the doctor." "I can't afford a place to live."

There are times when the words "I can't" determine our reality, when, after uttering those words, we close our eyes to any possibility of hopefulness, to any belief in resurrection. And while "I can't" may be an expression of our situational reality, the spoken words pronounce hopelessness to all who hear.

But the words "I can" are words of strength and hope. The words "I can" are words of resurrection, words that change reality from death to life, from doubt to faith, from despair to hope. When overwhelmed by the needs of the masses, Mother Theresa focused not on what could not be accomplished, but what could be done. Mother Theresa shows us what is possible if we embrace an attitude of possibility. She encouraged by her actions, "*I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time - just one, one, one. So you begin. I began - I picked up one person. Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up forty-two thousand....The same thing goes for you, the same thing in your family, the same thing in your church, your community. Just begin - one, one, one.*"

In the epistle to the Church in Rome, chapter 8:6-11, we hear the reason for hope, for faith, for possibility. We hear the reason for uttering those blessed words, "I can." <sup>10</sup>*But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.* Did you hear that? What may seem to be death because of sin, becomes life because of Christ! If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, there is no reason to utter "I can't!"

There is hope! There is possibility! There is Life! Because the Spirit of God is able to do more than we even imagine. The Spirit of God living in us can love the family member that no one else is able to love because of anger or addiction or inner turmoil. The Spirit of God living in us can forgive the one who has caused us harm. The Spirit of God living in us can bring resurrection to our many places of despair, of hopelessness.

The scripture also tells us why we frequently enter into the “I can’t” modality. <sup>6</sup>*To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* <sup>7</sup>*For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot,* <sup>8</sup>*and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* When we are focused on ourselves, on our needs, on our limitations, on our flesh, we CAN NOT. The scripture tells us we can not please God when we are focused upon ourselves. It tells us that setting the mind on the flesh is death, it is literally telling God “No, I can’t!” like that child sitting in the middle of any overwhelming pile of toys. And when we tell God “I can’t” we are acknowledging that God does not live in us, for God Can.

This week we conclude our four week sermon series focused on our closing hymn. Take now my life, let me live for Thee, fill me with your power, Lord, Change the world through me. Today we focus upon those amazing words of possibility, “Change the world through me.” And I also proclaim to you the Good News that if Christ is living in you, All Things Are Possible. There is no need to proclaim those awful words “But I Can’t!” because of age, financial situation, past situations, physical limitations. For if Christ is living in you, God Can change the world through you.

We’ve spent the weeks of our Lenten Bible study looking at ways the Spring Lake Presbyterian Church can do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. And we’ve discovered there are many needs in our community and in our country, and this week we’ll learn about needs in our world as Dan Foster comes to share about his trip to the Sudan. Many of the needs we have discussed have been money-related. There are many in this county who are of working age who are not able to get a job. There are others who are senior citizens who are strapped for cash to the point that they will go without food or medication in order to make ends meet. There are those in our own congregation who are unable to pay their bills. But if the Spirit of God dwells in us, we CAN change the world by meeting these needs. Perhaps you need something done in your home – you CAN’T (or choose not to) work your garden or do your dishes or make your own dinner – but you have finances whereby you could pay someone to do those things for you. Perhaps you CAN’T pay your bills, but you CAN work someone’s garden or do someone’s dishes or make someone’s dinner.

I want each of you to make a list. The Ushers are going to pass out papers to each of you. On those papers I want you to write what you CAN’T do but also what you CAN do. You may write, “I can’t pay my bills” or “I can’t mow my own grass” or even “I can’t forgive my son.” You may write, “I CAN drive” or “I CAN do normal home repairs” or “I CAN read out loud to someone with macular degeneration” or “I CAN pay one person’s electric bill every three months.” Be as honest as you need to. I will be the only one to read your forms. Then, when the offering plate is passed, I want you to drop your list into the offering plate as part of your offering to God. When I return to the office tomorrow, I am going to try to match what you CAN do with what others CAN’T do, realizing that as the body of Christ with the Spirit of God making all things possible, we can eliminate the CAN’T’s from our vocabulary. AND I will ask you before revealing your CAN’T to others. We will begin here, among friends. We will begin by changing each other’s worlds, one person at a time, one need at a time. And when lives are changed, we will encourage more CANS by changing our neighbors’ lives one at a time, and then their neighbors’ lives, and then our community’s lives, and then our world’s lives! “Change the world through me” begins right now, right here, by offering to God ONE THING we CAN do, and offering to God our “Can’ts” so that God can end hopelessness and show us resurrection.

I conclude with another quote from Mother Theresa. *“Love, to be real, must cost - it must hurt - it must empty us of self.”* When we say “I CAN” we are pushing ourselves beyond what we believe is easy for the sake of someone else. We are putting a name on a need and telling that person, I love you because God loves through me. For if we continue to live for ourselves, in the flesh, we deny God the opportunity to love through us, to

change the world through us. And so we pray, honestly, painfully, “Take now my life. Let me live for Thee. Fill me with your power, Lord. Change the world through me.” Amen.