

“A Different Kind of Body” - Rev. Dr. Adam Hange

June 7, 2026 - Romans 12:1-13

I want to tell you something about my complicated relationship with the Letter to the Romans.

I was first introduced to this Epistle through what many of us know as the "Roman Road." Vacation Bible School. Church Camp. Youth Group. A handful of verses, carefully selected and arranged like stepping stones across a river—each one leading to the next, each one building the case. Romans 3:23. Romans 6:23. Romans 5:8. Romans 10:9.

For a long time, I thought that was Paul.

And when I started to have questions—about the faith I'd been handed, about the church, about who was welcome and who wasn't—I'll be honest, Paul felt like part of the problem.

For years, I kept Romans at a careful distance. The way you might keep a difficult relative at arm's length. Aware of their presence. Not quite ready to sit down together at the family reunion.

This week I came back to this text, and I found myself surprised. Consoled. Encouraged.

Because there is a word here that still has the power to heal and transform.

That word is *metanoia*.

It is usually translated as "repentance," but most of us hear repentance and immediately think guilt, shame, and self-condemnation. But *metanoia* means something different. It means to turn and see differently. A reorientation of the mind. A transformation of perception so complete that the world looks different when you come out the other side.

And isn't that what we hope for?

Isn't that another way of describing spiritual growth?

Paul writes: "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."

Maybe that's what I needed to do with Romans.

Turn.

Look again.

And what I found was not a systematic theology. Not a road map to heaven. What I found sounded more like a pep talk.

Paul is writing to a community he has never met. A community trying to live faithfully in the heart of the Roman Empire—a world with very strong opinions about who they should be and how they should live.

And he writes to them as if to say:

I see you.

I see the pressures you face.

I see the gifts you carry.

I see the beauty and diversity of who you are.

And don't let this world tell you otherwise.

Today feels like a threshold kind of Sunday. The first real Sunday of summer. The last week of school. Graduation weekend. The beginning of Pride Month. The culmination of our stewardship season.

Different things, perhaps—but all of them asking the same question:

Who are we becoming?

Paul has an answer.

Not a program.

Not a doctrine.

A vision.

A vision of transformed community.

First he says:

Don't be conformed.

Be transformed.

There are plenty of voices eager to tell us who we should be. Conform your body. Conform your ambitions. Conform your values. Conform your identity.

Most of us know that pressure in one form or another.

For our LGBTQ+ siblings, that pressure has often carried a particular weight. Too often the church has been among the loudest voices demanding conformity.

But Paul is speaking to people who also know something about the cost of standing apart. To follow Jesus in Rome was to reject the logic of empire—the belief that some people matter more than others, that power determines worth, and that belonging must be earned.

Paul says:

Stop letting the age define you.

Be transformed.

Renew your imagination.

Learn to see differently.

And when you do, you begin to notice something.

The gifts already present among you.

Paul starts naming them. Teaching. Encouraging. Leading. Giving. Compassion. Ministry.

No ranking.

No hierarchy.

No gift elevated above another.

Just a simple truth:

The body needs all of them.

The diversity of gifts is not a problem to solve. It is the whole point.

The church has not always remembered that. Some people have spent years being told that their gifts came with conditions. That their welcome was provisional. That who they were was somehow too much—or not enough.

The church itself needs *metanoia*. A renewal of mind. A transformation of vision. So that we can finally see what God has been doing all along.

But Paul isn't actually most interested in what our gifts are.

He is interested in what we do with them.

Because every community has gifted people.

The question is whether those gifts are exercised in love.

And that is where Paul turns next.

"Let love be genuine."

I think this may be the heart of the whole passage.

Let love be genuine.

Love without masks.

Not performative kindness.

Not polite smiles hiding indifference.

Not welcome in theory but exclusion in practice.

Genuine love.

The kind that risks honesty.

The kind that stays when things become difficult.

The kind that honors another person's dignity even when we don't fully understand their experience.

Paul continues:

"Love one another with mutual affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

I love that phrase.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

Not status.

Not influence.

Not certainty.

Not being right.

Honor.

Imagine if Christians became known for competing at that. Imagine if our first instinct was to notice the image of God in one another. To treat each person as a gift rather than a threat. To ask not, "How do I win?" but "How do I honor?"

And then Paul offers one final instruction:

"Pursue hospitality to strangers."

The Greek word is *philoxenia*.

Love of the stranger.

Not tolerance.

Not merely acceptance.

Love.

Many of us know what it feels like to be the stranger. To arrive at a door wondering if there will be room. To wait and see whether the welcome is real.

And because we know that feeling, we are called to keep opening the door.

Wider, even, than it was opened for us.

That is what this Table represents.

One bread.

One body.

Many members.

No one ranked above another.

No one required to prove they belong before they are welcomed.

The Communion Table is the embodied practice of everything Paul has just described: genuine love, mutual affection, honor, generosity, and hospitality.

Which brings me back to stewardship.

When you offer a pledge, you are not purchasing membership. You are not paying dues. You are not earning belonging.

You already belong.

Stewardship is simply the practice of offering what God has already placed in your hands—your resources, your presence, your gifts—for the flourishing of the whole body.

Perhaps that is what Paul is doing here. Not constructing a road to heaven. Not building a system. Simply imagining what a transformed community looks like.

Genuine love.

Mutual affection.

Honor.

Generosity.

Hospitality.

A people who rejoice in hope, remain patient in suffering, and persevere in prayer.
A people who know that every gift matters. A people who keep making room at the table.

In a world constantly demanding our conformity, that kind of community is its own act of transformation in the world.

Week after week, I see glimpses of that here.

I see it in the ways you care for one another. In the meals delivered. The cards written. The rides offered. The prayers shared. The conversations held after worship. The courage to keep showing up for one another, even when life is difficult.

I see it in the ways you make room for people who have been told there is no room for them. I see it in your generosity. I see it in your willingness to imagine a wider welcome than the one many of us inherited.

And perhaps most importantly, you teach me how to stop, turn, and see the world in new ways.

That is my prayer for us this season.

That we would continue to practice *metanoia*.

That we would continue to be transformed.

That our love would be genuine.

That our hospitality would be wide.

And that together we would become the kind of community Paul imagined—a community where every gift matters, every person belongs, and God's love is made visible in the world.

Will you join me in a spirit of prayer?