

3-17-24 Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sermon: The Word is Transformation

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, CTW: PS. 99

Hymns: 110, 512, 507

Theme: Christians are always to be in the process of a change - a transformation. It's a part of our nature. Just like a human can't help but grow old, the Christian also can't help but change. He has to. But it's not something that we try to stop or hide, no, this change is a good thing - it makes us beautiful. Unlike the transfiguration of Christ and more like the caterpillar, it is more subtle, more difficult to see. What kind of a change is it? How does it come about, and are you including it in your prayer requests?

Introduction: Transforming Change

One of the most amazing miracles of nature is the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. When you look at the before and after of the same creature, it is like night and day. It changes from being slow and fat and crawling on the ground, to colorful and thin and flying through the air.

Yet the actual metamorphosis is a rather boring procedure from our point of view. All we actually can see is the cocoon on the outside, while all of the change is going on the inside.

When Jesus Christ went up on the Mount of Transfiguration - the change was much different. In a matter of moments he went from being normal looking Jesus into a completely bright and awesome looking God.

His clothes suddenly started shining like lightning and became as white as snow. It was as if he took off His outer clothing to reveal a completely different side of Himself. From this metamorphosis there was no mistaking it - the disciples could clearly see who Jesus was. Jesus was God.

Christians also are supposed to be under the process of a change - a transformation. It's a part of our nature. Just like a human

can't help but grow old, the Christian also can't help but change. He has to.

It's not something that we try to stop or hide, no, this change is a good thing - it makes us beautiful.

For most of us, the change is more subtle, more difficult to see. What kind of a change is it? How does it come about? There are signs to look for to identify change in your life:

I. The Transformation of the Christian

A. It separates us from the world

Being a Christian back in Paul's time must have a strange thing. Here were two sets of Jews, both claiming the same heritage, both using the same handbook, both even worshiping in the same vicinity for a time - within the confines of the temple.

You would think with such things in common they could have come together or at least managed to live together. Yet the two groups were completely divided. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law absolutely hated the Christians and wanted them eradicated.

On the other side, the Christians also realized that in spite of their commonalities, there was to be no compromise - they couldn't just join together. Instead of seeking what they had in common, they did their best to convert these Old Testament Jews into the Christian faith. There were differences - big differences - which led to the persecution of the Christian church and the stoning of Stephen.

Paul - who once persecuted the Christian church for these differences - talks about what it was that specifically made the Christian religion different from the Jewish one.

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read.

Even though they read Moses and listened to him regularly, they didn't see the real Moses. This is illustrated in the accusations that the Jews brought against Stephen in Acts 6 when they said, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

When they listened to Moses, all they were concerned about two main things - the customs and the laws. They thought that was the most glorious part of what Moses was about - as his face was shining and all after coming down from Mt. Sinai. Just like Judah with Tamar, the veil covered their hearts so they couldn't truly see what they were supposed to see.

B. It draws us back to the Law of God

The same problem exists within Christianity today. What do I mean? If you look at the main movements in American society today, you are hit with the feeling that we need to speak out for what is right and wrong.

We live in a society that is under the veil of ignorance that thinks that life is ours to live how THEY want - their own sense of right and wrong. People don't know History and they don't know God's Word.

But conservative Christianity has decided that in order to get us off the path we are going down, we need to use and rely upon the Word of God. Therefore, Christianity has been focusing on answering law with law.

In other words, they are trying to transform people through the law - bring about converts and shape not only Christianity but also society with the law and traditions of Moses. I see people beating each other over the heads with rules and laws in an attempt to "win the argument."

At first glance, this legalistic argument seems attractive - trying to promote Christianity by showing how to live and what to do... that it is always about the rules and regulations.

But in another sense, it makes us look like a religion that only constrains people...does not let them grow. Therefore we make a mistake if we forget the Spiritual side of things...

II. Transformation Comes from the Spirit

If we really want a transformation to begin in our world, it can't start with Moses. That's not where transformation begins.

A. Paul said, Only in Christ is the veil taken away. . .

Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit. True transformation begins "only in Christ" and in "the Spirit." The Lord has to bring it about.

Paul described this way to transformation in chapter 1 when he says that, He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

The "anointing" that Paul was pointing back to was baptism - where he said that God put His Spirit in our hearts. When you were baptized and given the Holy Spirit - God was putting his seal of ownership on you. He was putting His name on you and saying, "you are mine."

The true transformation of the world and the Christian then begins with a difference in status that God puts you under. At baptism, through faith IN CHRIST, God says, "through faith in Christ I have now given you all of His righteousness - all of His perfection. You now have everything that I demand for salvation. Everything on this earth is being used for your benefit. Everything works for your good."

That's where the true transformation begins. Not in what is demanded of you, but what is given to you - the Holy Spirit and faith and the new status in God's eyes as a forgiven and holy child of God.

B. Transformation continues then in realizing who you are and what God has given you. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. The same drum just keeps on beating

throughout Paul's letter to his fellow Christians. True freedom starts with realizing WHO God is and WHAT God has done for you.

Think about the major things that our society is enslaved by. The want of acceptance, the need to be loved, the search of happiness, the feeling of being free, the desire for a higher purpose in life.

The whole concept behind the Constitution is the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. So people seek happiness in sex. When they feel constrained and stressed in life, they seek liberty in alcohol.

When they want acceptance, they make babies and pamper each other so that other people will like them. And all of these avenues to freedom and happiness only end up enslaving them.

Alcohol offers freedom from pain for a night, and then causes more pain in the morning.

Sex makes someone feel accepted for a moment, but then leaves a path of distrust and anger after the rejection.

C. Christ gives us all these things that we need for free.

It's only the Spirit that can free us from these ideas. We know that in Christ - through his righteousness - God accepts us.

We know that in baptism, God forgives us. The more we realize these things, the more free we truly become. If God accepts me, then I don't need to crave acceptance from my spouse or my friends.

If God has all things work out for my good, then I don't need to worry about the future. If God already punished me in Christ, then I don't need to punish myself with this constant guilt. If I know that I will be given a new body and eternal pleasures at God's right hand in heaven, then I won't revolve my life around the temporary pleasures on earth.

Truly knowing Christ and having the Holy Spirit means that your whole life and attitude will change. It has to.

So if we want real change, it has to come in Christ, not Moses. If we want to really get along with our spouse, and our friends and our neighbors and strangers, we have to realize who we really are.

If we want our kids to behave decently, they need to be baptized and reminded of what baptism did for them. That's where freedom begins, and that's where growth continues. We need to constantly be reminded of what Christ did for us on the cross, and how we look in God's sight. If we want a reformation to take place, we need to keep preaching the Gospel.

III. Transformation makes us shine with boldness and truth

A. In Acts chapter 6 the Gospel was preached to the Jews with an incredible boldness. When the Teachers of the Law accused Stephen of eradicating Moses, he said to them, "I'm not getting rid of Moses, I'm showing you the true Moses. Moses told us about Abraham - the father of faith. Moses wasn't just a law giver - he was a deliverer.

He prophesied about the Savior to come. He was also a Gospel giver. As a matter of fact, that was his primary message." When Stephen did that, the Teachers of the Law stoned him to death.

I see many Christians today who are responding like those Teachers of the Law. They are very zealous for the law. They don't like to see people murdering innocent babies. Now more than ever there is a moral divide in our country, and Christians are becoming more and more frustrated.

B. Remember the story of the Rainbow Man. He would strategically plan exactly where he could hang the sign John 3:16 at every major sporting event.

He wanted everyone to know that Jesus died for them. It started out great. But over time, people didn't respond the way he wanted. Therefore, he became more and more frustrated, to the point of holding some hostages in a hotel room so he could get his message out through a press conference.

When the Gospel didn't work the way he wanted it to, he turned to anger and breaking the law to force his point.

I see this same rationalization in people who bomb abortion clinics and think they need to use force. I see this same attitude in Christians who are depressed over the removal of the Ten Commandments from our court houses. I am even tempted to respond the same way when I see our Nation and Founding Fathers being slandered and misinterpreted.

The natural response is to just lay down the law and say, "come on people, let's wake up! Get your act straight now or face the consequences! Amen!" we feel that it's either to do that or water down God's Word to just try and get people to keep coming - to try and entertain.

C. However, it's only when you truly have the freedom in Christ, you realize that these are not the right responses.

Paul said, Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. In the old days, Paul thought that conversion would have to come from locking people up and putting them to death. But when he was shown Christ, when Paul met setbacks, instead of being militant and angry at the world, Paul said, "we don't lose heart."

We must continue to live and preach the Gospel and lift our prayers for the healing of this world to God as is said in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

That's what the transformation of the Christian is all about. Amen. Let Us Pray...