

April 18, 2010  
Third Sunday of Easter  
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Transformed

Acts 9:1-20

Christ is Risen!  
<Christ is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!>

On this third Sunday of Easter, let us celebrate the transforming power of the Risen Christ. As Paul was transformed from persecutor to advocate, Ignatius of Loyola was transformed from soldier to priest, John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace,” was transformed from slave trader to minister, and Albert Schweitzer was transformed from minister to missionary doctor, so is the power of God working to transform us all into beings of God's love.

As we talked about last week, the Risen Christ brings peace in our lives, but the Risen Christ also has the power to transform, to change the ways we view and live in the world. And the transformation brought on by a relationship with the Holy may not always seem peaceful.

Certainly, Paul, Ignatius, Newton, and Schweitzer must have all felt some turmoil in their transformations. But ultimately, it seems they came to a place of greater peace. Peace within the turmoil of life. Peace brought on by knowing that they were finally following God's intentions for their lives, going where God was calling.

This transforming call of God speaks to each one of us constantly.

This transforming power of God lives within each one of us always.

The Risen Christ is life over death.

Hope over despair.

Love over fear.

The Risen Christ is more than the human being that was Jesus.

The Risen Christ lives on today transforming lives.

This is not only the Christ in Jesus, a middle eastern Jewish man, or, worse, the white male virgin Jesus that is often portrayed, but this is the Christ seen in real lives today, the Christ seen in an African person, a Native American person, a Hispanic person, an Asian person, and people of all races, as well as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person, a straight person, a man, a woman, an intersex person.

This is the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Divine spark, that is in each one of us in all of our differences and diversity, calling us to transformation, calling us to God's intention for us, calling to us with love.

We only have to listen for God's call and be willing to follow. As the poem on the cover of the bulletin from the Islamic mystic Rumi says:

Try and be a sheet of paper with nothing on it.  
Be a spot of ground where nothing is growing,  
where something might be planted,  
a seed, possibly, from the Absolute.

Sometimes God's call seems magnificent. John Newton heard God in a violent storm at sea. Paul heard God's call in a flash of

light and a vision of Jesus. And, as if he were struck by lightning, it probably left him a little dazed and bewildered by what was happening.

But, sometimes God's call is more subtle. Ignatius of Loyola heard God in the energy behind his daydreams. Albert Schweitzer heard God speak in a magazine article.

However God calls to us, we need to be receptive.  
We need to be listening,  
in prayer,  
in meditation,  
in nature,  
in music,  
however we are most present with God.  
We need to be willing to be transformed.

Because we can say no. That is our freedom and, perhaps, our great tragedy. We can say no to God.

But if we want to accept God's love and be transformed by it, following God's intention for our lives, then we need to be open to change.

The author of the website where I got my butterfly information from states, "One cannot become a butterfly by remaining a caterpillar." We need to be receptive to be transformed.

These stories of transformation that we've mentioned today also demonstrate some other things as well.

We cannot limit God. We don't know what the future holds, how God might want to use us, or who even God wants to use. In fact, I believe God has an intention for each and every one of us. God doesn't just speak to the so-called righteous.

God called to Paul, a persecutor of Christians,  
God called to John Newton, a slave trader,

God called to Ignatius of Loyola, a man of war.  
Everyone is called by God.

I think the only question is whether we will listen. Are we willing to be on a journey of transformation through God's love?

We cannot limit God. God is at work in places and in people that we might not expect. We need to be open, receptive to a transformational process.

It doesn't happen overnight, just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly through a process that takes time, so are the transformations in our lives.

And we also need to let go of the results. God's plan is not necessarily our plan.

I'm sure Paul thought he was doing the work of God when he was persecuting Christians. But then God called him in another direction. And he listened.

And in this story, note that Ananias also has to listen to God's call. He doesn't want to help Paul. He's afraid of what Paul has been doing to the Christian movement. Like so many stories in the Bible, Ananias' first inclination is to say no, to talk God out of this crazy idea that makes no sense. But sometimes our no gets changed into a yes.

God doesn't stop calling us to be who we really are because our first response is no. God keeps talking.

So instead of his initial no, Ananias listens to God and goes to Paul. But, I wonder how far Paul would have gotten if Ananias had finally refused. If he had said no way am I helping him. Paul needed Ananias.

God does not mean for us to be in this alone. We are in this

together. We need to help each other.

Paul had Ananias to help him.

Both had to listen to God and at least for a time be on their spiritual journeys together.

Both, the persecutor of Christians and the devout follower of Christ, had their worlds changed by listening to God's call.

Their perceptions had to change, what they thought was truth had to shift. But first, both had to be open to God's change, both of these enemies had to be willing to interact with and experience each other as well as God.

This interaction, experiencing one another, seeing the Christ in the other as well as in ourself often leads to transformation.

Most people who perceive being anything but heterosexual as wrong do not change their minds through logical arguments about Biblical interpretation. Most change their mind because someone they know and love has told them that they are gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender.

Lives are often transformed by love and personal experience, by seeing the Christ in someone where we hadn't expected to see it.

Where in your life do you least expect to find Christ, God, the Holy? I would challenge all of us to look for the Divine where we least expect it. And then see how that experience might transform us.

Where is God leading you? When God tells us, as God told Paul and Ananias, "get up and go," what will our response be?

Don't resist God, don't resist who you really are.

Be open to God's call.

Be on this love-filled journey to God,

to become one with the Tao,

to be blended into God and soaked in God's qualities.

We cannot know where this journey will take us.

We cannot limit God.

Look and you will find the love of God in unexpected places.

The Tao, the power of God, the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ, is everywhere.

The power of the Risen Christ is the power to be transformed.

That power is in each of us and calling to us.

Let us listen and follow.

Amen.