

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
186th Anniversary Sunday, May 5, 2019
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Crawford**

“Transform”

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said:

*“Christians are too often like THERMOMETERS, registering and reflecting the temperature all around them, when in fact we are called to be **THERMOSTATS**, influencing and changing the spiritual, moral, and cultural atmosphere of the society in which we live.”*

Thermostats- regulating, influencing, changing, transforming the temperature, the reality, the world.

As Christians we constantly seem to be pulled between the ways of God and the ways of the world.

We are called to live “in Christ” but also physically live in the world.

In his book “**Christ and Culture**,”

theologian Reinhold Niebuhr discusses the relationship between the two and presents several options for how they interact and in the end, he sees **Christ as the Transformer of culture**.

We are to be transformed by the power of God's Spirit living through us. We are called to be ALL about the **transformation of our minds**.

AND we stand with the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther King, AND Reinhold Niebuhr by INSISTING that transformed “minds” **without** bodies, presented as living sacrifices, is a pious intellectualism that doesn't really amount to very much.

No, the whole point of a transformed mind is that we might be discerning people, perceiving in the midst of our day to day personal, and professional lives, what discipleship and the church look like.

God has always been about this embodied transformation. God is at work... the spirit taming the chaos, the abundance of Eden, Noah's deliverance, Moses drawn out of the water, wilderness being a place of growth, gratitude and song, slaves set free from an Egyptian prison, Hannah with her little son Samuel ... and it continues all the way to life from death, in the empty tomb.

Paul spends much of the first 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans talking about ideas, doctrines, and theories

BUT in the 12th chapter,

Paul begins to put all of these theories into practice!

This is where the rubber meets the road, a practical theology.

Here is what the MSG interpretation

“So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. (Romans 12: 1-2, MSG)”

Here are the implications of God’s grace, on the way we live our lives, as individuals, and as communities of faith. What follows are 23 separate imperatives.

Quite dramatically, Paul encourages and challenges the church. He sets out a task that might take their whole earthly lives to fulfill. It is all about **how to practically live a life of love.**

1. Take your life and place it before God as an offering

- Fix your attention on God – you’ll be changed from inside out
- God brings the best out of you

2. We are part of an interconnected body

- We find our meaning and function as part of the whole body
- Be who we were made to be (naturally creative,
- Don't compare ourselves
- Don't try being something we aren't
- Focus on the gift you've been given – don't do more
- Live out your gift joyfully

3. Love from the centre of who you are

- Be good friends who love deeply
- Practice playing second fiddle
- It's not about you

4. Serve the Lord & rely on the Spirit

- Be open & patient, don't quit when the going gets tough
- Turn to God in prayer

5. Extend Hospitality to everyone

- Bless and love even your enemies
- Be present to people where they are at
- Extend friendship to everyone
- Discover beauty in everyone
- Be generous with your resources
- Meet every situation with goodness and love

Being a transformer is not about some big, larger than life act, or some gratuitous gesture, rather being a transformer, true to life and faith- is about a whole bunch of seemingly small and insignificant acts that in their sum total are transformational.

Story

- 30 years ago, in a Hawaii State Hospital – ward for mentally ill criminals
- People who had committed extremely serious crimes (murder, rape, kidnapping, etc.) and who had very deep mental challenges
- Place was so bleak that paint wouldn't even stick on walls
- Everything decaying and depressing
- Not a day would pass without internal conflict and attacks
- People walked with their backs against the wall, no level of trust
- Inmates would never be brought outside because of their threatening behaviour
- High staff turn around

New Doctor Stanley Hew Len – Clinical Psychologist

- Nurses were skeptical of a new doc who would impose new theories and proposals
- He didn't do this – he was just present, always cheerful and smiling, in a very natural relaxed way.
- He studied inmates' files and told other staff about something called: Ho'oponopono.
- **Ho'oponopono – theory that we are 100% responsible for ourselves**
- Assumes that we have the power to change our experience of others, to change how we experience the world by working on ourselves.
- Ask question: "What is going on in me that is having me experience others in this way?"
- Dr. Hew Len points out "Didn't you notice that whenever you experience a problem, you are there, and somehow a part of it?"
- **Mantra: "I love you, I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you." X 3**
- Repeating this mantra is cleansing – getting rid of negativity, resentment, hatred, anger, etc.
- Encouraging us to erase all that gets in the way of taping into innate God given love that is at the centre of ALL of us
- Everything changed!
- Inmates off drugs, could go outside, behaviours changed, more staff wanted to work there, Freedom of inmates
- Dr. Hew Len worked there for 4 years and at the end the ward closed because almost all the inmates were released

Our human action is always divinely inspired, and energized, moving towards God, moving towards God's future, moving towards God's kingdom.

Transformed individuals become the transformed community. "We, who are many, are one body in Christ."

Throughout the ages, the church has been faced with the challenge of naming, articulating, and living out its life as a distinct community.

In the global North, it appears that many churches have become so comfortable, that they have lost their identity as an alternative community. Driven by the desire for relevance and seduced by the much coveted 3 B's of success: Building, Budget, and Bodies (members,) churches have played footsie with the dominant culture without realizing that soon they have gone to bed with a culture of domination, privilege, accumulation and consumption.

The Transformed church offers an invitation to a new community that nurtures believers to live differently- to live out their calling both, within the faith community, and in the wider world. Life that is lived in the Spirit of the crucified and risen One.

Indeed, we become the church when we conspire (breathe together), with the Spirit, and when we conspire (sharing life-giving breath) with one another.

Transformation invites breathe, life and love ...

Transformation changes us from the inside out.

In the ups and downs of the journey we call life, engaging in transformation is not a one-time event, it's not a one and done reality... rather it's a process, it's a journey, it's a calling.

As we celebrate the faithfulness of God, and of God's people here at New St. James today. I think and pray about who will experience that transformation in the days, weeks, months and years ahead. Who will experience the love of God, the grace of God, the power of God, because someone will take the time?

God is active and at work in this place, in YOU, evoking transformation. It is my prayer that New St. James will continue to be a place of transformation. I have confidence that the good work that God began in Jesus Christ in this place, continues...

Be thermostats, not thermometers.

Be transformed. Live transformed. Transform.

NSJ PRAYERS

Prayers for the World

Hear our prayer O God

as we hear your call

If only the world heard your voice as clearly as Paul

and recognized its truth

grant us the strength to be your voice in this world

So, we pray for this world

so much violence and no solution;
so much that has been done rightly or wrongly;
and a fear and panic that no solution can be found

So, for those who find prejudice a way of life we pray;
for those who are trapped and caught up we pray;
for those who have been displaced we pray;
and for those living with and making decisions we pray
Hear us

For all forms of prejudice;
for folk who physically or emotionally build walls we pray
for those who live with an extreme view of religion
for those who are self interested we pray
Hear us

In the midst of all the noise,
there are also voices of reason and peace;
perhaps they speak in whispers, but they speak, nonetheless.
May those whispers rise to shouts
that proclaim the way forward with words and not weapons.

As the machines of greed and war trample the world and its peoples,
we remember that there are seeds of justice and love and goodness and grace
that are planted and watered every moment of every day.
We give thanks for those who:

- rise early in the morning to prepare food
at countless soup kitchens around the world;
- search the night streets for lost children
and shepherd them to places of safety;
- keep watch amidst the sick and dying
in countless hospitals and caring places;
- speak words of compassion to those in dark places.

It is a complicated and challenging world.
Strengthen us as we stand and bear witness to this whole life,
especially the life of the Risen One,
Jesus Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer for New St. James

Holy God, Lover of all your children:
the tomb has been opened,
and we dance into your future.
Your life has dawned on us,
and we surround you with our praise.
You reach out your hand,
and lead us into joy.

Jesus Christ, Faithful Witness:
you pick open the locked doors
of our hearts
and come in to be with us forever.
You breathe peace into our souls,
so we may bring healing
to a troubled world.

Holy Spirit, Breath of Peace:
you show us our hearts,
so we may give love to others.
You show us our hands,
sending us to serve the needy.
You show us your hope,
so we may live in your joy.

Faithful Trinity, Three in One:
We give thanks for this place: New St. James Presbyterian Church
For your faithfulness over the years and for the company of Saints who for 186 years have
followed you, in word and in deed.
Bless these people, bless this place, bless this mission,
That your Good News may be shared for another 186 years and beyond in this place.

God in Community, Holy in One,
who was, who is, and who is to come,
hear us as we pray the words that our Lord Jesus, taught the disciples to pray together...