

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Dramatic Transformation"  
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Reformation Sunday

There are many moments in our lives that we might consider transformative. Maybe we might not consider as such at that very moment, because it takes to process the moment after it has happened. Someone loses a loved one unexpectedly. Someone receives a promotion they didn't expect. Someone gets a diagnosis of cancer or some other difficult disease.

Even my friends in ministry who received a gift to their church when they had just started ministry over a decade ago didn't know it was a transformative moment. An elderly gentleman was a bachelor and who lived quite frugally had actually given a large portion if not all of his properties and assets to the little church upon his death which happened quite suddenly. He had been the Treasurer of the Presbytery and I remember him giving us a lunch allowance by handing us loonies, one by one. This man startled the young ministers when the lawyer gave them a cheque for several hundred thousand dollars. Later they would learn that this was just the down payment. And a couple of million dollars later would they learn the full generosity of this man.

They didn't know at the time how transformative that moment would be for the little church, and consequently for their ministry and lives. Similarly we need a little time to digest what we hear and process it.

It took quite a while for the 90 theses of Martin Luther, nailed to the door of the church as a kind of invitation to debate in his day in Wittenburg, Germany, October 31, 1517, to be understood as a focal point for a large movement which would be called Protestantism by some and the Reformation by others. And each of the reformers would be doing different things, John Calvin in Geneva, John Knox in Scotland, Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, Guillaume Farel in Neuchatel and other places they would live. It was the cumulative effect of what they did that brought on a movement to return to the basics of the faith: faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone.

And so we see this movement with the benefit of 500 years of perspective, including the movements that reacted to this movement. But it is hard to get perspective on our own lives. We've had thousands of years to look at Job's

life. To wonder about what happened to him, and why he had to go through so much suffering, even when God Himself says that he was righteous, and was boasting of him. Yet in today's reading we hear Job repenting of his desire to out-argue God. He regains his health, is reconciled with his family, and has another family of his own, some of whom are considered the most attractive in the region at the time.

Job undergoes a dramatic transformation. The beauty of what happens to him is how he hangs on to his relationship with God, even though he doesn't understand everything he is going through. The parallel to Jesus is that Jesus does understand much of what he goes through, yet chooses to go through it anyway, and therefore becomes a high priest who can understand us and rescue us from our loneliness, our depression, our being overwhelmed by what is before us. Jesus as the Eternal Son and Servant King becomes for us exactly what we need as we suffer, as we go through looking for reasons, looking for love.

Transformation is something that God wants to do within each of us. It is more than correcting, rectifying, remedying, redressing, revising or amending. In fact, it is more than reformation. It is a fully changing us from the inside out, and not only us as individuals, but us as a community as well.

So to invite God into our lives is as exciting as signing on any space expedition, or deep sea investigation. It means going places we have never even thought about. It means saying "yes" to the One who has been and will be changing us for the next two thousand years since he came.

A big part of that adventure beginning for each of us is the acknowledging of our need. So we often come back to this square #1. Our need of God and one another is a consistent witness throughout Scripture. Today we hear Bartimaeus' voice screaming out. I know as Presbyterians we may not tend to be screamers but sometimes you just have to raise your voice to get your point across. Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus' healing in other parts of the holy land. He now wanted mercy from the Messiah, and shouted this out in a loud voice over and over.

Now there used to be what they called "primal scream" groups a couple of decades ago, where you would be in a group that would allow individuals to take turns banging pillows on the floor, screaming and shouting, often with profanities and the idea was to get it out of your system with supportive

others around you. This is not what Bart was doing. I don't think he was being a nuisance at the side of the road, as one reference work I consulted said. I think he wanted to encounter Jesus and see if all this was true, what he had been hearing about him.

And so we put on Bart's shoes today. Do we want to cry out to the Lord? Or would we let the Lord walk by without such an outcry? This is a challenge to how we practice prayer in our lives...in our church. Some other churches are known for their passion and fervor, not usually us.

But once we have the Lord's attention, he asks an unusual question. He sees Bart's blindness and yet he still asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus probably could have read his mind, but chose not to do so. Or at least, if he did, he still asked. "What do you want me to do for you?" Have you dared to ask the Lord this question lately? It's a tough question to ask, because if we ask it, what happens then? Will the Lord do what we ask, like in blind Bartimaeus' case, or will he allow something else like in Job's situation. Because God is not a vending machine for miracles or healing, yet God is very interested in speaking to us about what is stirring our hearts. He also wants to grant us the desires of our hearts, yet not when it is against something else He is doing in our lives. We cannot see the whole picture, but God wants us to bring forward what's on our hearts and minds as strongly as possible.

And this bringing of our hearts and minds to the Lord is not meant to be something we only do alone. Did you notice there were other voices involved in the resolving of whether Bart would get time with Jesus? Someone brought him the good news that the Master would see him and spend time with him. And similarly we need one another to help each other see our needs, and bring one another to the Lord. Because on our own, we often don't even know what to ask for. That's why I'm such a big believer in small groups. It's hard on a Sunday morning to take in what we need as individuals. But in a small group during the week sometime, we can talk, process, cry out, care for one another and experience the Lord together. We need one another. I know I need others. And we have several groups, but we can start new ones as well. Maybe God is calling you to start one.

Whether we need vision, as Bart did, or freedom from paralysis, as the man who was helped into Jesus' presence by four strong friends, or whether we need relief from the flu as Peter's mother-in-law did, (H1N1 or otherwise),

we need the Lord and we need each other. I hope you have the support that you need from the church here. It is our intention to make sure every single person gets the help and care they need. At the same time as saying this, we know we need to improve in this area, and want you to talk to us about your need. So here is another chance to do so, whether to me or to the elders or anyone else you know here. Please take the time to do so.

The reformation began as a way to get back to the basics, not as a way to make new churches, even though that is how it turned out. We are not today into church bashing, nor do we proclaim that we have the only way here at St. David's. We want to help you and care for you as you seek to know the Lord, give yourself to God, and to the believing community. Tell us how we can help. Tell us what we are doing well. Tell us what we need to improve.

You may have already spoken these things, and you may feel like you are repeating yourself, but again please tell us. The transformation that we are looking for personally, and the transformation that we are looking for corporately involve the crying out of individuals to God and to the leadership here. We trust the Lord for this process, and your part in it.

Let us pray.