

Being Called to Transform
John 21:1-19

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be truly open to the word of God this day. Amen.

From hatred to love, from enemy to supporter, from denial to trust, from rejection to acceptance; today's readings are about being called to transform. Both our first and Gospel readings have dramatic examples of men who were called upon to change. In very spectacular ways two men who you would have never considered are changed. The point is that God can and does choose people to change and begin again, even the most unlikely person.

Take Saul in our first reading. He was the last person you would have expected God to pick as a proclaimer of the Good News. He would have been almost the least likely person any one would have thought of as one who would become a preacher and teacher of Jesus' love and grace. Saul had been a zealot of the Jewish traditions, in fact he was so enthusiastic that he had made it his personal ambition to harass and persecute as many Christians as he could. He was the Jewish hired gun that was empowered by the Jewish council to seek out and destroy Christians anywhere he could find them.

Saul if he lived today was someone that many people may have admired. He was powerful, self-confident, and an influential person. He considered that he was in control of his life. He had a clear purpose and career path, he was on the fast track to success. The Bible even tells us that he stood above the rest of the crowd. He had the best education. A member of a proud Jewish family and a Roman free citizen, giving him privileges that not all people in Israel could claim. As a young man he oversaw the stoning of Stephen, when he dared speak against the Jewish authorities. And then he is given the authority by the Sanhedrin to destroy this cultic movement of Christianity. Acts records that Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison. Remember he is on the side of the majority, that viewed the Christians as a problem to be exterminated, a cult that needed to be cleansed and destroyed. So Paul was viewed more as a hero and the perfect man to get the job done.

He was so successful in Jerusalem, that the Christians started to flee to other cities. So Paul is on the road to Damascus to seek out more of these followers of Christ. Then at this most unexpected place and time, while on the road to Damascus, the resurrected Jesus appears to Saul and speaks with him. This self-confident, powerful, controlled Saul suddenly

finds his world upside down. He is confronted with the truth, blinded and told what to do. Remember Saul is used to giving the orders, but here he is helpless and depended on others, fully relying on the promise of Christ. Like a little child, Saul is led to Damascus, not able to see and ate and drank nothing for three days until God allows him to see in a new way. And Paul is reborn, called by Jesus to proclaim the truth of the resurrection.

Peter in like fashion is transformed. He had been a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus first appeared to him and his brother telling them to follow him and become fishers of men. Peter and Andrew drop what they are doing and leave their old life behind and follow off after Jesus to be his disciples, his students. Peter was not from a rich powerful family. He wasn't taught in the best schools. He learned the trade of his family, the smelly, sticky, fishing trade. Just enough to get by but not enough to get rich. That had been Peter's life. Until he met Jesus, then he was part of the inner circle of Jesus' students. His followers looked to him as one of Jesus' closest friends. Peter was there at all the big events, the wedding at Cana, the Feeding the five thousand, the mount of transfiguration, the last Supper. Peter spoke for all the disciples at the table when he swore to do anything for Jesus even die with him in need be. Even after Jesus warns him that he will deny him three times by the time the cock crows in the morning, Peter rejects this prediction knowing he will not do such a horrible thing.

But we all know by morning Peter has done exactly that. Imagine Peter's pain as he says for the third time, I do not know that man, and Jesus looks at him through the beatings and the blood pouring down off his head. And in that moment when their eyes lock, the cock crows and Peter knows that three times he has denied even knowing Jesus. Imagine the anguish of that moment. No wonder he ran to see the grave that morning when the woman came back and said it was empty. What would he say, what could he do to beg forgiveness for betraying Jesus in his most needed hour.

Now back in Galilee, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples go back to what they know, fishing. This is what is familiar, this is their home, this is their lives, this is what they have always done. But Jesus is calling these men out of their normal routine, to transform them into something new.

On the shore after the amazing catch of fish and the breakfast, Jesus approaches Simon Peter and looks him right in the eyes again and says, "Simon Son of John , do you love me more than these?"

Then a second time Jesus looks at Peter and says, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” And a Third time Jesus approaches Peter and looks him in the eyes and says, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Three times Jesus asks Peter the same question, three times he forces Peter to feel the shame of being singled out and asked point blank do you love me. Three times he overcomes his three denials by saying Yes, Lord I love you. And each time Jesus commands him to be transformed, feed my lambs, tend my sheep and a third time feed my lambs. Remember Peter is a fisherman not a shepherd. Jesus is commanding Peter to be the shepherd now. To no longer be the fisherman on the sea of Galilee, to leave behind forever everything he has always done and to reach out in doing new things. Caring for the people of God, leading the church, sharing the good news, and the peace of knowing the joy of the resurrected Lord.

Peter is transformed from the man who was ashamed for his denial, from a fisherman, small town follower of a wandering rabbi, into the first true leader of the early church. He becomes the leader of men, the creator of churches, and the establisher of doctrine. He picks up the mantle of Christ and carries on as Christ as commanded him, being transformed into the faithful leader he was called to become.

Both Paul and Peter become men of God, against all odds and circumstances. They are called by Christ and transformed into something new. Against the popular opinion, against the thoughts of friends, neighbors, and family, they risk their lives to become the true witness of the love of God.

What have we risked here at St. Mark to become the true witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus has asked us and commanded us to be his witnesses, to be transformed from what is comfortable, what we have always done, what we have always been to fulfill the call to ministry of the word of God so it may flourish here in this church and throughout our community. We can't keep fishing as a church like we always have, because as you all know that hasn't been to productive in the past. Attendance, Sunday School, Bible study, committees, commitments all are down. Individually as Christians, as people of God, what have we done lately to be transformed into a closer walk with God, to be changed into a more active witness of God's message? Going the same way we have always done will just keep pulling in empty nets. Jesus calls to us just as he did Peter and Paul to change course, to be transformed and to seek to do God's work always. Let us seek that transforming moment this day and always. Let us seek the Lord. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you today and throughout the coming week. Amen