

“Transformation”

John 6:1-21, Mark 16:5-8, Ephesians 3:16-21 & Philippians 4:Select Phrases

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Barbara Brown Taylor wrote, “The word that created heaven and earth, the word that became flesh and dwelt among us, the word that blew through an upper room and set believers' heads on fire -- that word is still loose in a world that cannot contain it, still seeking those who will hear it and speak it -- waking the sleepers, freeing the prisoners, raising the dead.”

God is constantly transforming us. God delights when we partner with God in transforming the world. A Franciscan blessing prays, “May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.”

The gospel of John highlights God’s power to transform, to bring light and abundant life to all people. In today’s scripture Jesus transforms brokenness into wholeness through healing. The timing is Passover. God transforms captivity into freedom. God transforms hunger into a satisfying meal. God transforms fear into security.

John 6:1-21 NLT “After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?” Jesus was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do. Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!” Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. “There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?” “Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.” So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves. When the people saw Jesus do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself. That evening Jesus’ disciples went down to the shore to wait for him. But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn’t come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, but he called out to them, “Don’t be afraid. I am here!” Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!”

Jesus is inviting us to look beyond ordinary expectations to realize that God is doing the supernatural, to look beyond negative news to celebrate the abundance of love, joy, generosity, goodness, and compassion all around us and in us.

The hangry and exhausted crowd was fed and renewed by laying in a green pasture by the compassion of their shepherd. The disciples were afraid of the future. Jesus told them, “Do not be afraid, I am here and filled them with peace.” Jesus was teaching and modeling that, God is constantly transforming us and the world, God is constantly sculpting more abundant life, God is constantly growing love, joy, peace and goodness. Do you perceive this transformation or are you like the disciples blinded by the need, the cost and fear, or is the Holy Spirit giving you visions of how small acts of love are magnified by God, joined with other acts of love right now transforming the world? The story of God’s love always goes on. God’s love is a thread that started creation and will continue for eternity. Your life is woven into that thread. So is everyone’s life. So is all of the cosmos. That thread of God’s love is making all glorious. We are all on a journey that enables us to give and receive more and more love and joy. Every goodness is from God. Every goodness is drawing us together into the spectacular, magnificent complimentary family God created us to belong to for eternity. Whenever you are

afraid, take a deep breath, breathe in God's love, imagine what transformation God might be drawing you, this church, our world into. Whenever you are overwhelmed with scarcity, center upon God, breathe in God's abundance, imagine how God is partnering with you to provide overflowing abundance.

Are you afraid for the future of our country? God is transforming us. Are you afraid for the future of North Presbyterian Church? God is transforming us. Perhaps last week's Festival of Cultures is a glimpse of our future. Will we continue to grow in diversity and an appreciation for each person's uniqueness, the ways each person reveals a different facet of God giving us all a more complete experience of God? Will we continue to grow in Hands-On Mission making a personal, compassionate, loving difference in another's person's life that deepens the joy in all of us?

Change is constant and certain, this church, all churches, will never go back to the way things were in the past. The way things were, was right for that season. Now we are in a different season, a different place on our journey so God has different ways for us to be, different things for us to do, different ways to receive God's joyful, transforming love. We are called to look around with compassion, to see the need, to imagine how God is transforming us and to identify what we have that we can give to God, for God will multiply that gift to transform us all.

What other positive, progressive transformation do you see God doing in you, in this church, in the world? How can you partner with God in the transformation? In what ways is God expanding your graciousness, this church's graciousness, the world's graciousness? How will you hand over your fear to Jesus and let God propel you further on the journey?

Where do you perceive God? Perceive hope? Perceive love, joy, peace, transformation? Perceive wholeness, healing, movement, passion? Perceive compassion, community, goodness. Think about these perceptions. Dwell on these perceptions. Dream about these perceptions for God will transform your mind, heart, actions and the world. The Apostle Paul put it this way, **Philippians 4:Select Phrases "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Don't worry about anything. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."**

The Apostle Paul prayed for you. **Ephesians 3:16-21 "I pray that from God's glorious, unlimited resources God will empower you with inner strength through God's Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in God. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now all glory to God, who is able, through God's mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen."**

Change, transformation is scary, difficult work. The disciples identified Jesus' transformation as terrifying. The women who witnessed the resurrection were frightened. **Mark 16:5-8 "When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. Jesus isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died." The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened."**

Our human nature is that we like to be stuck, no matter how good the change is, no matter how much we want to change, our being wants to go back to the way things were, to maintain the status quo. God loves us too much to let us get stuck in brokenness and incompleteness. God is constantly transforming us into shalom; that is perfection, wholeness, completeness, full joy, absolute love.

Our human nature is to focus on the negative, the hunger of the crowd, the waves and distance to the shore, the brutality of the crucifixion, the death and darkness, instead of everyone having plenty to eat with baskets full of left overs, the growth and adventure that comes from the journey, resurrection, life, and light.

Barbara Brown Taylor relates her experience of accompanying nine teenagers from her parish on a trip to repair homes on a Navajo reservation: "We went with a half a dozen paint brushes and some other assorted

tools, most of us with only a vague notion of how to paint a house or build a flight of steps. We went, in other words, with something less than five loaves and two fishes, and the Navajos knew it ... just a crowd of sleepy, skinny, confused looking kids.” The tribal officials did not believe that a total of 240 teenagers would really arrive; thus few arrangements had been made to receive them. Anglos had made promises before, and nothing had happened. On the first day, Taylor’s group was sent out with linoleum tiles, some scrapers, glue, razor blades, a measuring tape, a couple of doors, and an electric drill. “We had no idea what to do, so we just started doing it. The Navajos were amazed by our industry, and we had lots of visitors who came by just to watch us work.” Halfway through the week, Navajos who had been observing from the sidelines began to pitch in. They had decided that if kids from all over the country came here to work, the least they could do was help. There were so many of them that they almost put the teenagers out of a job. At the end of the week most of the projects were completed with a total of 5,500 work hours. The reservation was dotted with new roofs, paint, corrals, floors, stucco, and porches. Taylor concludes: “We went into the week skinny with five loaves and two fishes, but we came out fat, with twelve baskets to spare. Not because we did anything right, not because we had enough to give, but because God made good on his promise to match our gifts, such as they were, with his own. It is something to remember, when the crowd looks too big, the odds too poor, the work too hard, the situation too helpless. It is something to remember when our own resources look too meager, our efforts too puny, our spirits too low. “It is not up to you to feed the whole world, to solve the whole problem, to fix the whole world. It is just up to you to share what you have got, to feed whatever big or little hunger that happens to be standing right in front of you. The rest will come. Because God is God, the rest will come.”

I have been on 19 workcamps. I could focus on the hot and dirty conditions, crummy sleeping arrangements, miserable showers, sleep deprivation, muscle aches, the stress of being responsible for the wellbeing of our group, the cost of the trip, the amount of work to make workcamp happen. There have been sometimes when I thought maybe I do not want to do workcamp anymore but then I think about the transformations. Residents given hope. Houses renovated. A community invigorated. The transformation of the workcampers, some find their voice, others discover a new gift, some experience a taste of heaven in the singing, dancing and worship, others discover confidence, some experience grace, forgiveness and a fresh start, others discover how with God they are tremendously powerful. The list could go on and on for God does something unique for each person and every year the transformation is progressive. I go to workcamp to be transformed by God and witness transformation.

I wonder if Renee or Coleen would say similar things about VBS, or Paul about the Festival of Cultures. There is hard work, stresses, and frustrations yet the transformation in the end is glorious. Perhaps you feel this way about North Presbyterian Church. You give generously, donate your time and talents abundantly, are frustrated by some of the decisions, hurt by some of the things said and done and so forth, yet you perceive the transformation happening in you, in this church, in the world and you are enlivened to be a part of it. God is transforming all.

Every time the Israelites lost hope, God nourished them with manna. Every time we lose hope, are frustrated, discouraged, uncertain about the future, angered by politics, disgusted with violence, repulsed by hatred, uncertain with fear, overwhelmed with sadness, Jesus feeds us the bread of life, the transformation of God.

“May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.” God is transforming all. Amen