

Be Transformed

If you were here last Sunday, after the service, over at Shim Hall, then you got a glimpse, a taste, a feel, for the kingdom of God.

The many poured out their gifts to say thank you for the gifts of the few.

Looking around that hall, so many people from so many places, languages being spoken from all over the world, foods of every variety, music and songs sung by old and young, yes; one need not look hard to see the Spirit of God walking among us.

When Paul calls us today to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds," he is inviting us to participate in the mind, in the heart, in the spirit, of Jesus.

It's not a call to guilt nor is it a call to doing something hard.

It is a call to remove the blinders we each of us wear, blinders that allow us to see only separation from one another, from creation, from God; and, once removed, to begin to see that all of humanity, all of life, is truly and really ONE.

That's the glimpse of the Kingdom offered to each of us last Sunday.

It's what Jesus is getting at when he tells the story of the Master throwing the great banquet, and all the folks on the invitation list beg off.

So the order goes out to round up everyone the servants can find, from every street corner and bar, and crowds them all into the great hall.

Sound familiar? Think Shim Hall, last Sunday!

"Be transformed by the renewing of your minds," Paul exhorts.

By putting on the mind of Christ, we enter into the unity of humanity and God.

Meister Eckhart says: "By the same eye that you see God, God sees you."

Jesus is the eye.

Putting on the mind of Christ is to live the Kingdom NOW, to sense the real presence of God NOW, to see every single person as a child of God, a brother and sister in Christ.

That's the life Jesus lives.

It's the life everyone who follows him is invited to live.

This transformation doesn't come quickly and it doesn't come easily.

Nor is it we who cause it to happen.

It is God's gift, but a gift we can accept or reject.

Our role model in all of this, time and time again, is Peter.

Peter the impetuous.

Peter the flawed.

Peter the stubborn, for good and for bad.

Today, he and the disciples are questioned by Jesus.

Usually, it is they who question him.

“What does that parable mean?”

“What’s that about the yeast of the Pharisees?”

But not today.

Today, Jesus does the asking.

“Who do the people say I am?”

The response is the expected one: “You are someone we are familiar with.”

“You are John the Baptist, or one of the prophets.

Someone we know something about.”

Someone familiar to us.

It’s often like that.

We hold up a mirror so that Jesus looks like us, looks like our culture, our values, our sense of security and order.

It’s like the fellow in Kentucky during a community debate about whether to start teaching foreign languages in the local high school.

He stood up and said that, why, if English was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for us!

But Jesus is not a mirror.

Jesus is a window.

A window into the Kingdom of God.

And the view is like nothing we have seen before.

Thomas Aquinas, the great doctor of the church who spent every day for 15 years writing some 40 volumes about every conceivable part of our faith, one day, after an experience during the mass: call it being taken up into the seventh heaven; call it a glimpse behind the veil that separates heaven and earth; call it what you will, after that experience, Aquinas lay down his pen and never wrote another word.

When his concerned assistant, a young man named Reginald, asked him why he stopped writing, Aquinas replied:

“Reginald, I cannot. All that I have written seems to me like straw, compared to what has now been revealed to me.”

Aquinas peered through the window that is Jesus, and was transformed.

“Who do *you* say I am?” is the next question.

And it is Peter, not from his brilliance or insight, but from an insight given by God, an insight Peter accepts, who announces the miracle that is Jesus.

“You are Messiah, the Son of God.”

On the rock of that statement of faith, Jesus proclaims, his church shall be built.

And to that, I say, “Thank God.”

Thank God it is Peter who holds the keys to the Kingdom.

Flawed, oh so human Peter, who only moments after striking exactly the right chord, pulls Jesus aside and scolds him when Jesus tells them all that the Messiah is not the warrior king they see in their mirror, but a suffering Messiah, one who will die in order to be glorified.

Peter objects, and Jesus denounces him.

And at that, the rock that is the foundation of the church becomes a stumbling block.

I can relate to Peter, and I'll bet you can too.

Peter's journey toward putting on the mind of Christ was as full of doubt and uncertainty and fear as any one of ours.

So how can we go about this putting on the mind of Christ?

It begins and ends with prayer, prayer that starts with something like this.

Our Buddhist friends call it a "beginner's mind".

If you have a "beginner's mind, you don't have enough experience or so-called success to predetermine what you can or cannot do, what is and isn't possible.

A beginner assumes and predicts nothing.

A beginner is wide open to the new, the unexpected, the seemingly impossible. Swenson, *Christian Century*, 8/18/08.

It is that kind of prayer: sitting or walking or kneeling in the silent presence of God; with a beginners mind, not speaking, just listening.

If we practice that kind of prayer, we won't be like the young monk who asked a master to teach him; only to go on and on about how much he already knew.

The Master, as he sat listening quietly to the boy babble on, starts pouring a cup of tea.

The Master continues to pour the tea even as it runs out and over the cup.

The boy yells to him to stop pouring, the cup is already full!

The Master replies:

"How can I teach you anything, for you too are already full."

In Peter's last meeting with Jesus, the resurrected Jesus is on the beach, having cooked breakfast for his friends.

Peter sits in the emptiness of the cock crowing as he denied Jesus for the third time.

Peter sits in the emptiness of his brave words that shriveled to impotence as he fled arrest and watched Jesus go to his death alone.

Peter is now empty of all he thought he knew, all he thought he was.

Now Peter has a beginner's mind.

Jesus sits down next to Peter, and with his arm over Peter's shoulder, asks three times: "Do you love me?"

Three times, Peter replies, "You know I do."

Three times, Jesus tells him: "Feed my sheep."

And with that, the empty Peter is filled; taking on once again the mind of Christ.

He sits by the fire, picks up a piece of charred fish, and eats his breakfast.