

Sunday, May 5, 2019

Acts 9:1-6

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

Transformed, Changed and Renewed (by God)

A London newspaper carried a letter written by an eleven-year-old boy to his mother while he was on vacation in Switzerland. He wrote this: "Dear Mom, yesterday the instructor took eight of us to the slopes to teach us to ski. I was not very good at it, so I broke a leg. Thank goodness, it wasn't mine! Love, Billy."

Now, that mother had only a limited insight into what actually happened on the ski slopes of Switzerland that day. No doubt she would be questioning the boy when he returned home and also to help the child who did break his leg.

We too have only a limited insight into what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus or even on the shore of the Sea of Galilee one morning after Jesus' resurrection. But one thing we know is that Jesus spoke to Saul and changed his life forever. Just like Jesus spoke to Simon Peter and pestered him with his question "Do you love me?" three times. Why did Jesus question Saul about what he was doing? And why did Jesus ask Simon Peter three times if he loved him after he rose from death? Was it to teach Peter something? Or is the teaching for us who are reading these stories with 21st Century eyes and understanding?

Christians around the world talk about the transforming love of Jesus; or how God changed their lives from the old to the new and even how this Easter they truly have been renewed in their faith in God because of seeing and experiencing the Spirit speak to them. We know of some Christian churches which speak of 'saved theology' where one can pinpoint the time of when Christ saved them and they received him into their hearts. Or there are other denominations which invite people to come and listen and we'll pray that something or Someone including the Spirit of God will act and touch the lives causing immediate reactions and responses. And there are still other church communities of faith where what appeals to the people is what they do in response to the Spirit's work but often are unsure when this change and renewed moment of faith has occurred. But they serve Christ anyway!

When we look at Saul's story we know that was a major transformation which occurred in his life. Saul had approved of the stoning of the Christian named Stephen. Saul was a Roman

soldier at whose feet the people laid their coats in approval of the death of the martyr. Yet it is as he is doing the work of a soldier that he is struck by a bright light from heaven. And it is then he falls to the ground and hears the voice of Jesus asking him why he is persecuting Jesus? Saul says, "Who are you Lord" And Jesus replies, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Jesus then tells him what to do in Damascus. And it is from this time on that Saul is changed. He is now one who believes in Jesus and preaches this message. This was a conversion experience the old person becomes new—and with Saul he becomes Paul and as such becomes one of the greatest Christian leaders of time.

What does it mean to be transformed, changed or renewed by God today? You might have heard testimonies of people who reached bottom in their lives because of the sins of this world—and through prayer and God's Spirit there is a transformation from the old to the new. You might have experienced this yourself but in our church family we are not usually akin to this. We are more relaxed in how we share our stories because we are still being changed. Our faith is renewing itself with new insights, experiences- good and bad and lessons taught and learned. And this is true for all of us—all ages and experiences.

God changes lives through the work of the spirit and how we as individuals respond to this Spirit. And just as God's spirits touches people so are communities transformed, changed and renewed. For when we reflect on ourselves we might not think we have grown in our faith in God yet what causes us to move in our hearts and minds to do the things we do is our faith and trust in God who loves us so much. We are reminded again and again that we are the feet and hands of Jesus and called to serve him.

When Peter and Jesus were having breakfast on the beach after the disciples caught 153 fish- Jesus asked him 3 times, Do you love me? Each time Peter responded with "Yes, Lord, I love you." Was this because Peter had denied him 3 times or was Jesus really checking in with Peter's level of faith and commitment.

Jesus asked Saul- why do you persecute me? And he could not answer because his life was now being transformed by the Spirit. Peter was asked if he loved Jesus three times. He responded I do. What would you say to Jesus? How would you answer? Because what Jesus tells Peter changes his life's plan forever. "feed my sheep;" Peter is given his life's mission— feed my sheep. He is to be telling the message of Jesus' death and resurrection to all who would listen. Because it is through this that the gift of forgiveness is given and received. Feed my sheep. Tell them that they are forgiven of all their sins. Share with them that they are loved

because they were created by God and tell them that in order to grow in faith they need to believe.

On this Third Sunday of Easter, it is easy to say, of course I love Jesus because he died and rose for me. Because of his resurrection I am forgiven of all sins—even those committed this week or months ago—all is forgiven. But we must remember that when we are forgiven we need to look at what was done for forgiveness to be required learn from this and strive not to repeat. This is true for all people—All people sin and will continue to sin. But as Christ's followers, we have sought him and know him to be the one who will change our lives—a little bit at a time; maybe a lot in specific times, or even total transformation. Yet what is changed in us is this- our faith is stronger, our understanding of Jesus changes our perspective because he has called us to love him and in turn—feed his sheep

But how are we to “feed his sheep”? We are to love as Jesus does; to share the message of hope, life eternal, and do so because Jesus died and rose again for our sakes. We are to teach the stories of Jesus; tell about his healing, his sermons, His messages of hope when all seems lost. To share what it means to know him and how He leads our lives and how we can grow in faith because of him.

Feeding His sheep also means living life moment to moment as Jesus showed the disciples- with love by telling Jesus' story of hope beyond this life and what lies ahead of us for our sake. It means sharing the message of life eternal in the promised home with God who created us. And it means knowing that we are loved unconditionally no matter the sins committed, God will forgive and enable us to start anew. In this new or renewed way of living we are called to share and show others what peace we experience because Jesus walks with us; we are also to share the joy that can come to us as well. And all of these gifts of Jesus are received—think about Peter, Paul, the disciples of the past; reflect on those who went before us those whom you knew and loved and those people who are our examples of faithful followers today. We are transformed, changed and renewed by God—all we need to do is say yes to Jesus, to answer his question of whether we love him-with honesty and trust and to realize again that we will be forever changed and changing our lives through Christ Jesus because of the resurrection! Let us rejoice in this as we are changed “Little by Little’ Amen.