

Transformed

Romans 12:1-2

Introduction

(Begin with video of metamorphosis).

The metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly is one of the most fascinating things to watch in this entire amazing world. This year, thousands of elementary school children will get to witness this firsthand.

- Shipments of little larvae will arrive at their schools and be transferred into an aquarium where every day students will gather around to watch as those butterflies burst into life.

The chameleon is another fascinating creature. Chameleons have the amazing ability to alter their appearance in order to blend into their background. You have to look close if you want to find one.

I like chameleons. I really do. But when you are preaching a series of sermons about what Christ wants His church to be, chameleons make lousy sermon illustrations

- Because chameleons become indistinguishable from their surroundings.
- And Christ has called His Church to be different.

To stand out, not to blend in.

As you know, this summer we are looking for words in one of the three lectionary texts, looking for a word that will unpack what Jesus intended when He announced the creation of the church.

- We have referred to that creation all summer long, but you heard the announcement read in its context as today's Gospel lesson:

(Jesus speaking): On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

So far this summer we have used the words CALLED, SENT, ALIVE, HEIRS, CONQUERORS, HUNGRY, WALKING AND SEEKING. Today we add this word to our list:

TRANSFORMED

We find it in Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:2)

The Scriptures teach us that when we become Christians, we undergo a metamorphosis. Not from one species to another, not from caterpillar to butterfly. It is even more dramatic than that:

We are transformed from a child of the world to a child of God.

And in so doing, we become the church Christ came to create. You may remember this verse:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Apostle Peter says it like this:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession ... Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people ... (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Let me unpack that with these clarifications:

#1: TRANSFORMATION IS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

Look again at verse 2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind. **Then** you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

I want you to pay particular attention to a couple of words in this verse. I have them highlighted for you: Renewing and Then.

- Both of those words suggest a process ... something still underway.
 - Renewing is something ongoing.
 - Then points to a later time.

You are a child of God. Now. But at the same time you are becoming a child of God. You are in process.

- You are the church and you are becoming the church.
- The transformation process described in this text is both NOW and IN THE FUTURE.

That's the same truth taught in one of my favorite verses:

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

When we walk with Jesus, we are always a work in progress. We are and we will be. All at the same time.

Let me illustrate it this way. This week hundreds of parents have been taking those obligatory "first day of school pictures." The tradition in my family was that my kids would stand in the front yard and hold up the number of fingers for the grade they were in. You probably did something similar. My kids have continued the tradition.

(Show two pictures of Gabriel, one the first day of 6th grade and one the first day of preschool)

- Which is Gabriel? Both
- Is he still the same kid? Yes and no.
- He is in the process of becoming. He is not yet what he will be, but he is still my grandson.

Likewise, you are the church. You are a child of God. But you are not all the way there yet. You are still being transformed.

#2: TRANSFORMATION IS A PASSIVE PROCESS

Look again at verse 2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

Again look at the highlighted words: be transformed. You English majors will recognize those highlighted words as a passive verb tense. For the rest of us, the writer does not say "transform yourself."

- Transformation is something that happens to us.

One day Jesus was walking along the seashore and came upon a fishing boat. It was owned by a man named Jonas. He was in the fishing business with his two sons, Andrew and Simon.

- Andrew was a quiet, thoughtful young man.
- Simon was brash and pushy. He always spoke before thinking. He had this knack for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. And truthfully, he was a coward underneath all that bravado.

Jesus took an instant liking to these two boys and invited them to follow Him as He traveled the countryside to talk about the Kingdom of God. They accepted.

- Of the two, Andrew was the most like one to put into a position of responsibility.
- But it was to Peter Jesus spoke these words:

Your family calls you "Simon." I will call you "Peter." (John 1:42)

The name "Peter" means "rock." Something stable, enduring. And from that moment on, Peter is the name that was used to describe this man. And over time, Peter became a rock. He was TRANSFORMED.

- It was Peter's confession of faith that became the foundation for the church. (On this rock I will build my church.)
- It was Peter who delivered the fiery message on Pentecost Sunday.

Long before he become a rock, Jesus called him a rock.

- Peter did nothing to make that transformation happen.

- Jesus did it all, from challenging him when he said stupid things, to inviting him back into the family when he failed miserably.

Peter had no ability to work that transformation himself. Jesus had to do it. And He did.

- Remember the Philippians verse from earlier:

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

He began the good work, and He will complete it.

#3: TRANSFORMATION IS AN EXPECTATION

Look again at verse 2:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

At the risk of sounding like an English professor, these words are an imperative. They are not a suggestion.

Max Lucado writes:

"God loves us too much to leave us unchanged." That phrase emphasizes that God's love is both active and transformative. While God accepts us in our current state, including our flaws and sins, His love motivates Him to guide us toward growth, holiness, and spiritual maturity.

This idea is often illustrated with the analogy of a parent and child: just as a loving parent allows a child to experience consequences or guidance to grow, God allows challenges, correction, and spiritual discipline to help us become better people.

Our role is to be open to what the Holy Spirit is doing in us, and to get ourselves out of the way so it can happen.

In our Sunday School last week, we talked about how God really isn't interested in just cleaning you up a little bit. He wants your complete transformation.

- When I go to the car wash, there are at least four choices of clean that I can choose.
 - God won't settle for a rinse only. No, He will use soap and scrub the underbody. And then He will get the vacuum cleaner out and fully detail you.

There is a phrase in the King James Version that I really like to use. When Jesus is being tempted in the wilderness by Satan, He responds with these words:

Get thee hence, Satan ... (Matthew 4:10)

It is a great phrase for each of us as we face those things which we know are conforming rather than transforming.

APPLICATION

One of the joys of being a pastor is that I get a front row seat to watch as the lives of people are transformed by God. As I look across this congregation, I see many stories that could serve as illustrations in a sermon like this one.

We each have a story – one not yet fully written. But it is a story about what God is doing in your life. How is God working in you? He is ... because we are the church.

Amen.