

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
27/08/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 1:8 – 2:10	Israelites oppressed – The birth of Moses
Psalms 124	The Lord will protect us from evildoers
Romans 12: 1-8	Be Transformed, Offer ourselves as living sacrifices, We all have different gifts to offer
Matthew 16: 13-20	Peter says Jesus is the Messiah Peter will be the Rock on which the Church is Built

Introduction

Good Morning Everyone! Today I would like to focus on the words from St Paul to the Romans in chapter 12 verse 2, “Be Transformed”.

And I would like to look at three aspects around what it is to, “Be Transformed”.

Firstly, I would like us to explore the question, “Why be transformed?”
Secondly, I would like us to look at, “How we might be transformed?”
And finally, I would like us to ask, “What are we transformed for?”

Why be Transformed?

So let us begin with the question, “Why be transformed?”

I'd like us to think about the reading from chapter 16 of Matthew's Gospel that we have just listened to, as we explore this question.

We hear how Jesus had been active in ministry, and he had obviously been getting noticed. He asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” He listens to their answers, and then he turns to them and asks, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter, who often speaks up first, replies to Jesus,

‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

For the Jews, this was indeed a very big statement. The Messiah was the ultimate expectation they had. The defining moment for the Jewish Nation had been their exodus from Egypt and their final arrival in the promised land. This is still central to the Jewish people in Israel today. But after they had settled in the promised land, they continued to face difficulties with other nations, being conquered by them and by being sent into exile. When Jesus arrived on the scene the Jewish Nation was being occupied by the Roman Empire. During all these trials and tribulations the Jewish People had been expecting a Messiah to come and save them, it's what the Prophets had told them would eventually happen.

When Peter tells Jesus, that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who is coming to put everything right in the world, Jesus doesn't try to correct Peter. Jesus doesn't try to tell Peter that he is over exaggerating. In fact, it's quite the opposite, Jesus tells Peter that he is blessed, and this insight has been revealed to him by God.

So, Jesus revealed to those who knew him whilst he was alive, in person, on this earth, that he was the one that God had sent into the world, so that all people might be reconciled to God. If we believe what Jesus said to his first followers, then the arrival of Jesus into our world, is the defining moment in Human History so far.

These are very big claims, Jesus is not just another good teacher who has come along to add his words to the wisdom of the world. But rather, Jesus is, as he claimed in John's Gospel, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

So, to accept and follow Jesus is the way to Life as it is truly meant to be lived, and to reject Jesus, is to turn our backs on where true life is to be found.

If Jesus is the way to God, then it would seem that the whole purpose of our lives is to, "Be Transformed" as followers of Jesus.

"How we might be Transformed?"

We become followers of Jesus, by accepting what he has done for us on the cross, this in effect is the beginning of our own transformation. As human beings we fall short of the glory of God, but by accepting what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we receive forgiveness and can be reconciled to God.

But Paul is writing to the Romans who are already Christians and tells them to be transformed "by the renewing of their minds".

You might be thinking, "How do I renew my mind?". It's not like a computer with a reset button. Even though we may have accepted Jesus, we are called to renew our minds by continually turning back to God in our lives.

The world around us will continue to tempt us and to lead us to do our own thing and satisfy our own desires. Some of this may be good for us, but it may also lead us astray.

We can renew our minds by continually being reminded by God's word in the Bible. The Bible is a book not made to be read once and put on the shelf, but to be used daily to encourage and strengthen us in our Christian lives. And as we read or listen to the Bible, day by day, our minds will be turned back to God.

We can renew our minds by spending time in prayer with God. It is a task that Jesus entered into throughout his life on earth, and if prayer was important for Jesus, it will also be important for us. Prayer is the means by which we commune with God. I recall a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, saying that he might spend an hour of time in prayer, but it might be only one minute of that

time where he really enters into the presence of God. So, prayer is something we will need to continue to work on throughout our lives, if it is going to help us to renew our minds.

We can renew our minds by spending time with other Christians and talking about our faith. We do this, to some extent in worship, but it is more likely to help us to renew our minds when we discuss the bible and our faith with others in person. We will get feedback on how we understand God, and we will learn from how others have experienced God in their lives. I feel it is good to be encouraged, by one another, in our faith.

There are of course many other ways to renew our minds to be transformed, but it is by constantly being in connection with God, that we become more and more in tune with God.

“What are we Transformed For?”

I would like to now look at our final question, “What are we transformed for?”

We are transformed to do God’s will in our World. The reality of the Christian faith is that it’s not all about us, but rather it’s all about God. I’ll say that again, because I think sometimes it’s a bit hard to get our heads around. The reality of the Christian faith is that it’s not all about us, but rather it’s all about God.

The more we surrender to God’s will, the more our lives will be in tune with God and the more content and fulfilled our lives will be. It seems a bit counterintuitive, but think of the opposite, when someone is totally selfish and self centred, they are extremely unlikely to be happy or contented in their lives.

So, we are transformed to do God’s will in the world, and God’s will is for all humanity to be in a right relationship with God. God can of course achieve this in many ways, but the primary way God has given us to do God’s will is by being a part of God’s people, “The Church!”

Sunday by Sunday we stand and affirm:-

“We are the Body of Christ, His Spirit is with us.”

So, we are transformed to build up the Body of Christ, and in the reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans we hear about using the gifts that God has given us to build up the body of Christ:-

⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

This is not of course an exhaustive list of all the gifts we may have, but it reminds us that we are all given gifts from God. And it reminds us that God calls us to use our gifts so that we can build one another up.

As Christians here at St Cuthbert's Tweed Heads, we are to "be transformed" so that we will be better enabled to do God's will, by using our God given gifts, to build up the "Body of Christ", here in this place.

Conclusion

Today we have looked at Romans 12:2 – "Be Transformed".

We have looked at the "Why?" – because Jesus is the way to God.

We have looked at the "How?" – by being in tune with God.

And, we have looked at the "What For?" – to build up the "Body of Christ".

I pray that we will all continue to "Be Transformed" so that we might continue to live into the wonderful lives that God has planned for us.

Amen.