



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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“Transformation Part 1: Personal Transformation”

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Good morning! I'm Chris Pan. I'm on staff here at the church. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to serve this church.

We are continuing today in our How To Pray sermon series. Our topic today is, “Transformation Part 1: Personal Transformation”. We'll actually be considering transformation for two weeks. This week I want to talk about transformation of us as individuals, personal transformation, changing into the image of Jesus Christ. Next week, we'll continue exploring transformation, but with a focus on transformation as a community.

I want to start with a terrible story. I'm warning you. It does not have a happy ending. But it is a great story to help us think about transformation. So, please hang in there with me. It will get better.

This is a picture of Gary Durham from October 2001. Gary Durham is driving down the street in Tampa, Florida. I'm not sure if a car cuts him off or he cuts another car off, but he and the other driver start yelling at each other. A newspaper describes it later like this: “Both drivers traded insults and hand gestures.” The driver of the other car, who was a new grandfather and a cancer survivor, pulls into a parking lot down the road. Gary Durham follows the

other driver into the parking lot, and gets out of his car, still yelling at the other driver. Gary Durham then walks up to the other driver and punches him in the face. The other driver falls backward onto the concrete, hits his head, and dies a few days later from brain injuries. Gary Durham drives off. He's arrested weeks later, is prosecuted and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

That is a terrible story, but it's not over. Gary Durham spends 11 years in prison. He's ordered to take anger management classes while in prison. He's released after more than a decade.

So now, it's August 2016, just last year—15 years later. Here's a picture of Gary Durham, 15 years later. Gary Durham is once again driving down a street in Florida. Once again, another car cuts him off, or he cuts off another car, and the drivers start yelling at each other—trading insults and hand gestures.

Gary Durham follows the other driver, cuts in front of him and stops his car, in traffic. Gary Durham gets out of his car and starts walking towards the other car, once again yelling at the other driver. Except this time, the driver of the other car, pulls out a gun, and shoots Gary Durham. Dead.

Fifteen years. Gary Durham killed a man in a road rage incident, then 15 years later, was killed in another road rage incident.

I know that was a terrible, terrible story, but it is the perfect cautionary tale for us to think about transformation.

Gary Durham didn't change over 15 years. He was in prison for more than a decade, took anger management classes, and yet he was the same—and it ended in tragedy.

Thinking about Gary Durham forces me to ask myself, “Have I changed in 15 years? Am I different than I was 15 years ago? What about five years ago? Or last year, or last month? Have I changed, or am I exactly the same?”

Do I have the same petty grievances and annoyances; the same impatience or insecurity or anger; the same resentment or bitterness, and hang-ups? Do I know myself better? Am I more emotionally mature? Do I treat people better?

How about you? Have you changed from 15 years ago, or five years, or last year? Are you the same or are you different?

Here's another question: "Will we be different 15 years from now? What about next year? How about next week? Will we be different?"

Let me give you the good news. From the New Testament of the Bible, our passage for today is from Paul's second letter to the early Christian church in the city of Corinth.

2 Corinthians Chapter 3, verse 18. *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

Once again: *"And we all, who with unveiled faces, contemplate or behold the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image, with every increasing glory, which comes from the Lord."*

Let's explore this today: Being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. As we go through this sermon ask yourself, "What is God saying to you? And what does He want you to do about it? What is God saying to me? What does He want me to do about it?"

Will you join me in prayer? God, we are here to be changed. We are here to be transformed into the image of Your Son Jesus. Open our ears to hear, open our eyes to see, soften our hearts. Speak to our head, to our hearts, and to our hands. May we behold glory of Your Son and be transformed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There is a clear group of people here today who can answer a resounding "Yes!" to the question, "Are you different today than 15 years ago?" And that group is 15-year-olds. And 14-

year-olds. Really anyone age 25 or under I think is pretty different. Back then you were a tiny baby, or a child, or you didn't even exist. You have transformed!

Paul says this in his first letter to the Corinthian church: *"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways."* (1 Corinthians 13:11)

We can think of transformation, as maturation, as growing in maturity in our faith.

Someone emailed one of our pastors writing, "Church is wonderful. Not a Sunday goes by that I don't come away feeling changed."

I love that email and I love that perspective. That person leaves every Sunday, and is a different person than when he came in. He is changed, transformed, and hopefully growing in maturity.

Because what are we doing here? Why are we here on Sunday morning, and why are we in a community of faith at all? Are we here to be educated? Or entertained? Or encouraged? Maybe all three of those things, and none of those are bad things, but I hope that we are also here to be changed by God, to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

And that doesn't happen just during this one hour on Sunday morning. And it's not limited to this building. I hope transformation happens here, during this time, and you come with that expectation. But I also hope that transformation happens out there during the other 167 hours

during the week that you aren't here.

And not just for us to be transformed, but to transform the people and the world around us, too.

Prayer is the time where we ask God to transform us, and our world. Prayer is also when we create the space and the time for God to do the transforming. The place and time where, as our passage today says, we contemplate and behold the Lord's glory.

This is the How to Pray Sermon Series—and the best way to learn how to pray, is to pray! So let's take a few moments now, to come before God. It'll be just a few moments. Close your eyes now if you'd like. Take a deep breath, and approach God in prayer; behold His glory and ask that He speak to you and transform you.

[Moment for Prayer]. God, may it be so.

Our passage again: *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

So, what does it mean to be transformed into the image of Jesus? What is the image of Christ like? A Beard? Sandals?

There are a lot of things we can focus on when thinking about being transformed into the image of Jesus: humility, mercy, grace. But I want to point us to the list the apostle Paul provides in his letter to the Galatian church, chapter 5, verses 22-23.

Paul writes: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

That’s a pretty good list. That’s a good list to look at and ask, “Am I different in these areas than I was 15 years ago, or last year, or last month? Have I grown in love? Or patience, in gentleness, or am I about the same?” Don’t you wish for Gary Durham’s sake that he had grown in peace and patience and self-control over 15 years?

Take a look at that list. And pick one! Pick one that you think, I really want God to transform me in this area, over the next few months, or year.

Which characteristic on that list would you love for someone next year, in July 2018 to say to you, “Man, you have really grown in joy over the past year.” Or, you have really become more gentle than last year. Or for us as a community, that someone would say to us next summer, “Man, the people at First Prez are really being transformed; they are way more loving than they were last year.” Or, way more full of peace.

Take a moment now, and come before God in prayer, just for a few moments, and say to Him, “I want to be transformed,” and name the specific area from that list in which you want to grow.

[Moment for Prayer]. God, may it be so.

Some of you might be thinking. Great, another self-improvement project that I have to work at and I’ll fail. Well, I have good news for you!

Look at the phrase in our passage today: *“Which comes from the LORD.”*

It is God’s work to transform you! It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. It’s not self-improvement. If you spend this week thinking, “I’m going to be more full of peace!” you will fail. So relax, because it is God’s supernatural work to transform us, not our own effort.

Don’t believe me? Here are three passages from the Bible to encourage you:

Romans 8:28-29: *“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”*

I Thessalonians 5:23-24: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.”*

And one last passage: Philippians 1:6 *“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”*

It is God’s supernatural work to transform us. But we don’t just sit back passively—letting go and letting God do all the work. We participate and co-operate with God through our obedience.

There are a lot of verses on this topic, but here’s just one:

Ephesians 5:1-2 *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

We are called to be active imitators of God.

What we’ve been talking about today has a fancy theological name: Sanctification. Sanctification is growing in likeness to Christ. It is growing in Christ-like maturity. And it is a gradual process. It is a journey that will span our lives from when we decide to follow Jesus to when we die.

Here’s a chart from my theology textbook from Divinity School. It’s called the Process of Sanctification.

In our lives before Jesus, we are slaves to sin. Then we experience salvation, conversion, and we are justified before God. And then we spend this long period in here, labeled Christian Life, growing in holiness, in maturity, being transformed. And then we die.

I like this chart because it shows that this process is a journey. And because I was a lawyer...I’ve got a long way to go! You know, if Christ-like holiness is over here (by the choir), and Pastor Dan and Karen Makishima are here, and all you nice church-going folks are here in the middle. And way over here are lawyers and recovering lawyers...I’ve got a long way to go. I need people to come along with me on this journey. Would you like to come with me on this journey of transformation?

I like this chart because it shows a long gradual, journey, heading up. But I like the chart from my daughter’s fourth grade classroom even more. It’s a chart called, “What Success Looks Like.”

That chart says, on the left, what people think success looks like: A line up and to the right. And then on the other side: What success really looks like: a line that is still up and to the right, but with a whole lot more squiggles. I don't know about you, but the messiness of that picture on the right feels a lot more accurate to the reality of my life.

And in case you think I'm just being falsely modest with the "Oh, I'm a lawyer. I've got a long journey thing," let me tell you about my own driving story from a few weeks ago.

I've been praying recently that God would increase peace and gentleness in my life. Here's what happened.

A few weeks ago, I was driving in Kaimuki. And if you know residential Kaimuki, the streets are two cars wide, but people park on one side. So to drive along, cars coming in one direction have to yield behind parked cars, letting the car with the right of way pass.

So I'm driving home, on the side without the parked cars, and a van comes down the street towards me, in my lane. And he's supposed to yield, and pull in behind the parked cars, but he doesn't. He just keeps on driving right at me. And this happens every so often, and it drives me crazy.

And I thought, he's supposed to yield, so I'm going to keep on going. So I slow down, but keep going, and he slows down, but keeps coming. And we're going like 5 miles an hour, right at each other. I'm thinking that he's going to pull over and he's thinking I'm going to let him pass. And in slow motion we just keep heading at each other, until we just

stop—right in front of each other. There's a parked car on this side, and we're just stopped, staring at each other through the windshield. And there was no trading of insults or hand gestures; we were just looking at each other.

And I'm thinking, "I'm in no hurry, I'm just going to sit here." And I'm sure he's thinking, "Who is this idiot?"

So we just sit there...for a long time. And now other cars have come up behind us. And that raises the stakes because now, one of us will have to go in reverse to let the other pass, and that is a humiliating sign of defeat.

So we sit there, and here's the worst part of the story. My eight-year-old son is in the car with me, in the back seat. And after a while he says, "Dad, you have to let him pass."

This clearly is the voice of reason, and the voice of the Spirit of God, telling me to humble myself. So I say to my son, "Noooo, *I* have the right of way, and he should let me pass."

So we continue to sit there, until reason and the Holy Spirit finally break through, and through gritted teeth, I begrudgingly put my car into reverse, back up, and let the van pass.

I prayed that God would grow me in peace and gentleness. And God doesn't just pop that into me. He puts me in real world situations—He puts us into real world situations—where we need to humble ourselves, and yield to God, and be transformed into the image of Jesus. That's how we are transformed.

There's a passage in the book of Matthew, chapter 25, where Jesus is describing the Day of Judgment. He is speaking to those who inherit the kingdom of heaven on one side, and those who don't on the other.

And Jesus says to those who don't get into the kingdom: "*I was hungry and you didn't give me food, I was thirsty and you didn't give me something to drink, I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me, naked and you didn't give me clothing, sick and in prison and you didn't visit me.*"

And these guys say, "*What? Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and didn't take care of you?*"

And Jesus says to them, "*Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.*"

It was Jesus in that van—asking me to yield. And just as I didn't do to the least of these, to the man in the van, I did not do it to Jesus. I was too busy insisting that I had the right of way.

Can we see God at work in our everyday lives, working to transform us?

If we want to be transformed, we have to yield to God. We have to get over our insistence the we have the right of way. And sometimes, we might miss the opportunity to yield. And if we want to move forward, we'll have to put ourselves in reverse and back up, in front of everyone, and humble ourselves even further, in humility and humiliation—and yield, in order to be transformed—because God always has the right of way.

A few weeks later, I'm driving down that same street, and another car is coming at me on my side of the street. And you know what I did? I yielded, and let the other car pass...because God is transforming me.

You know what else I did? I flashed my high beams at them when they went past, to show them that I wasn't happy, because God may be transforming me, but I still need much more transformation. It's a long journey! Amen? Amen! Every day, every year, we still need to grow.

We pray that God transforms us, and we create space and time in our lives to allow him to transform us. And then we need to see, with His eyes, all the opportunities He is giving us to yield, and be transformed into the image of Jesus.

Let's take another moment now, to once again, come before God in prayer, and reflect on how his working in our lives.

[Moment for Prayer]. God, may it be so.

We started today with a story about Gary Durham, a man who did not change over 15 years. It did not have a good ending. I want to end today, with a story about transformation that does have a much better ending.

Many of you were here for Youth Sunday, which we had at the end of May. On that Sunday, our high school youth take over and lead the congregation in worship. A few students shared their stories that day, and I get the privilege of sharing one more today. One of the students leading worship that day was Matthew Lum.

A few days before Youth Sunday, we received this email from Heidi, Matthew's mom. I have their permission to share this story:

Here's Heidi's email: "Our son, Matthew (19 years old), was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when he was four years old. Aspergers is a high-functioning form of autism. People with Aspergers are considered high-functioning because they can have incredible intellect. However, they still have the challenges of autism. My son didn't speak much until he was four, has had extreme difficulty having friendships, and hid under tables during Sunday School because the noise and social issues frightened him. He required his own cubby separate from all the other children when he entered school, so that he wouldn't run away. He would never go on stage, and would cover his eyes and ears, curled in a ball to protect himself from the onslaught of sight and sound. Karen Makishima and volunteers in FPC's children's and youth ministry have walked with our son through all of this. They have built up, and stayed with our son for 19 years.

"One night when Matthew was 16, the Lord gave him a miraculous gift. He picked up the ukulele and played his first song, 'Blessed be Your Name'. It was amazing! We had tried teaching him ukulele before, but it never made sense to him. Soon he taught himself banjo and guitar. He began to write songs. He now plays mandolin, composes orchestral music, writes his own lyrics and music scores, and performs vocals. This gift has opened up a whole new world of joy and relationships for Matthew."

Heidi continues, "I wanted to tell you this story because Matthew is leading worship in the youth band this Youth Sunday as lead guitarist and vocalist. Many of the songs have been arranged by him."

Heidi writes, "I hope on Youth Sunday you are encouraged by God and can worship Him in a whole new way, praising Him for what He is doing among our youth. All praise and honor and glory to God and to His Church, who have made this unfolding miracle possible!"

Transformation. Did you catch the ages in that email? Matthew, at age four, didn't speak, and was first diagnosed with Aspergers. At age 19, he was leading us all in worship. That's 15 years...15 years later. That's transformation.

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

What is God saying to you, and what does he want you to do about it? Close your eyes now if you prefer. And take a few moments in silence to reflect, to behold the Lord's glory. Jesus is standing in front of you, looking at you, with great love and tenderness. *[Sermon ends with video of Matthew Lum leading worship].*

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org and the audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by emailing: fpchkoolau@gmail.com