



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 16, 2017

"Transformation Part 2: Community Transformation"

Christopher Pan

Good morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff here at First Prez. Thanks, as always, for the opportunity to serve this church and to speak to today.

We are continuing in our How To Pray Sermon Series. This week's sermon is Transformation - Part 2: Community Transformation. If you missed Part 1, you can listen or view last week's sermon and all our sermons on the church website, or through the First Prez App.

Last week, we explored Transformation, Part 1: the topic of personal transformation—growing into the image of Christ. We asked ourselves, "Have we changed over the past five years, or last year, or last week? We leaned in to the work of God in our lives, sanctifying us; we asked God to transform us in the coming months. We focused on growing in one area of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So, did it work? Are you transformed? Are you more joyous? More patient? More loving? Looks good, looks good. But remember, it is a long gradual journey. It is God's work in us, and we cooperate. Wherever you are on this journey of faith, we hope that as a community, we help each other take the next step in the journey of faith.

Today, we'll be exploring transformation of the community... because God doesn't just want to transform us, He wants to transform our community and our world.

As we go through this sermon today, ask yourself, "What is God saying to me? And what does He want me to do about it?"

Let's pray: God, we come to be transformed into the image of your Son, Jesus Christ. And we come to be reminded of Your great love for us, and for this world. Speak to us now. May we hear Your voice and see You at work. May we hear what You are saying to us and know what You want us to do about it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's start with a passage that we looked at last week. In Ephesians 5:1 the Apostle Paul writes: *"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."*

As we consider being imitators of God, and being a fragrant offering, can I tell you what this verse makes me think of? It makes me think of this [shows slide]: It's a picture of a person who looks like their dog, or maybe the other way around, the dog looks like the

person. There are lots of these pictures. [Shows slides]

They are hilarious and ridiculous. And here's the theological point of these silly pictures: you end up being like those you spend a lot of time with.

There is a theory that you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. Is this true? I don't know. But it sure sounds true, doesn't it? You know what is scientifically verified—that your weight and behavior are affected by your friends. If a person has an obese friend, their chance of obesity goes up. If a teenager has friends who smoke or drink, that teenager's chance of smoking and drinking go up. You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.

I spend a lot of time with an eight-year-old and a ten-year-old. I'm not sure if I'm a lot like them, but I am certain of one thing. They are a lot like me. If there is one piece of parenting advice that I really believe, it is this: Children are terrible listeners, but excellent imitators. In all areas such as setting the table, cleaning their room, being patient, speaking kindly—I could tell my kids to do it, and maybe they listen.

But what really affects *their* behavior is *my* behavior. If I shout and yell, they shout and yell. If I stay up late, they want to stay up late. I can't just TELL them to be the kind of person I want them to be. I actually have TO BE the kind of person I want them to be.

If we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with, is God on that list? Are we creating the space and time for us to spend with God, so that we can imitate him?

This whole sermon series on How to Pray has provided practical, handy tools to spend time with God—like the Daily Examen that Pastor Dan preached about, or the Pray as you Go App, or making space for silence and solitude; it comes down to spending time in God's presence, so that we can be transformed.

You know what else is great about that passage from Ephesians, is the phrase, "a fragrant offering to God."

It echoes this passage in 2 Corinthians 2: **14** *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.* **15** *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;*

16 *to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?* **17** *For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in His presence.*

We are people sent from God, standing in God's presence. We are

the aroma of Christ to those being saved and those perishing.

As we think of our own transformation from spending time with God, we will be used by God as agents of transformation with others.

If we think again about the five people we spend the most time with on one side, is God on this list? And on the other side, is there someone on that list who does not yet know God and needs Him? A co-worker, or family member or neighbor? Because that person may never come through the doors of our church. And you, out there, in your office, or school, out in the world, are the closest that they will come to church. The closest they will come to seeing the glory of God...through you. Through God's transforming presence in your life, and your presence in their life. Bringing with you the fragrance that comes from knowing God.

This is the How to Pray Sermon series, and the best way to learn how to pray is to pray. So let's take just a few moments now to pray. It'll just be a few moments. Close your eyes now if you wish, take a deep breath. And as we come before God now, think of three people in your life who don't know God yet, who you wish knew God. Who do you wish would meet and know this God of transformation that you know? Think of those three people, and bring them before God. [Moment for Prayer]

Let's keep going. Last week, we explored this passage from 2 Corinthians 3:18: *"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."

We talked about being "transformed" into Jesus' image, and contemplating the Lord's glory, in prayer, and creating space for Him to do the work of transformation. We talked about "ever-increasing glory"—the gradual process of sanctification over our lives. And we talked about how the work of transformation "comes from the Lord"—how it is God's supernatural work that we cooperate with.

Let's look at those first two phrases: "We all", and "with unveiled faces"—which will help us understand our task as transformed agents of transformation.

First some backstory. In the verses that preceded our passage Paul is contrasting Moses and us. Paul refers to the book of Exodus, when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. There was thunder and lightning and smoke and the Israelites "trembled and stood at a distance and said to Moses: You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, or we will die."

So all the people of Israel stood at a distance from God and "only Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."

When Moses descends from the mountain, Exodus says: "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God."

The skin of Moses face was shining; it was radiant, because he was speaking with God. So Moses puts a veil over his face when he goes before the people.

With that backstory, can we grasp the revolutionary thing that Paul is saying in this verse?

The amazing contrast is that in the Old Testament, only Moses got to see God's glory. The people stood at a distance in terror. And the reflection of God's glory, on Moses' face was external; it was fleeting; it would fade and Moses would cover his face with a veil. Only Moses. External reflection of glory. Fleeting. Veiled.

Contrast that to our passage which tells us that because of Jesus, WE ALL get to behold the Lord's glory. Not just Moses, or the senior pastor, or people who stand on this stage. We all.

And it is an internal transformation of our character that reflects God's glory, instead of just external reflection on our faces. It is ever-increasing glory, instead of fleeting. And instead of seeing through a veil? Unveiled. We see God's glory unveiled, but also that all those around us see God's glory in us unveiled as well.

Earlier, you may have thought that you don't want to be the aroma of Christ to people, that that is what Pastor Dan is for. But you would be wrong! It's not just Moses on top of the mountain who gets to see God. It's all of us.

In the gospel of John 20:21, after His resurrection, Jesus says to His disciples, and He says to us: *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

You. Jesus is sending you. And me. "We all" are sent, just like "We all" behold Jesus's glory, not just Moses. All of us, not just our missionaries or church staff. We all.

You also might be thinking that you are not able to transform the

people you were praying for earlier. And you are right! You are not able, which is why we need God. Because He is able, and apart from Him, we can do nothing.

So, Jesus says in John 20:21, *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* And the next verse says, *"When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"*

We are not able to do any of this on our own strength. And God knows that. Which is why we need Jesus to be our Savior, why we need God to transform us, and why we have the Holy Spirit to guide us. Just like we can't transform ourselves through self-improvement, we can't transform other people or our community through our own efforts.

Last week we said, if you spent the week thinking, "I'm going to be more peaceful!" you would fail. And this week if you think, "I'm going to be a peacemaker!" you're also going to fail. We need God's supernatural work in our lives to transform us, and we need God's supernatural work through us to become agents of transformation. And fortunately for us, He has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us.

Let's pause now again to take a moment to pray. Close your eyes now if you wish, take a deep breath and speak and listen to the Holy Spirit, who is transforming you. [Moment for Prayer.] God, may it be so.

We are a sent people. Sent into the world, in the same way that God sent Jesus into the world.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah writes: *"But seek*

the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Jeremiah is writing to Jewish exiles, captured in Babylon. The word "welfare" is the Hebrew word: "Shalom". Shalom, meaning, peace, or wholeness. Shalom is nothing missing and nothing broken.

We are to pray for the shalom of our city, of our community, our island. Pray on its behalf. In its shalom, and welfare, and peace, we will find our welfare, peace, shalom.

Last week, we talked about the theological principle of sanctification—growing into the image of Christ.

Sanctification. Transformation. Here's another important theological principle: Constipation!

You think I'm joking, but there was a speaker at our national denomination meeting who asked the question, "Are we spiritually constipated Christians? "

Spiritual constipation is when we only take in, and take in, and take in, and nothing goes out. Do we take in God's love and blessings, listen to sermons, attend small groups and classes, pray for ourselves, and our growth, our transformation, and our needs, but none of that love, or blessing or transformation goes out of us?

There is a video that I love, by Jeff Vanderstelt, a pastor from Seattle who spoke at the HIM conference in March. He talks about this vision of the church, as a people sent into the world, and the subtle shift in mindset it takes.

The video is less than 2 minutes, and it's called, "Church is More Than A Building". [YouTube link is: <https://goo.gl/5nkTD8>]

Did you see the arrows going in and going out? Did you hear what he said? Send people out into the world. Right now this church has people in Rwanda, Swaziland, Cambodia and Iraq. But those aren't the only missionaries in this church. We are all missionaries. We also have people on Bishop Street and in Nanakuli, Kailua, and Kaimuki.

Did you hear that vision of people, "Serving the City where they live—using their gifts for the City's good. Filling the city with the presence of Christ."

Because our community needs Jesus. God is the God of the City, as we sang earlier. The people of our city need Jesus as much as we need Jesus. They are broken and fractured, in search of a Savior, just like we are broken and fractured and in search of a Savior. We are transformed, not just for ourselves, but so we can transform the community around us.

There is a prayer that I love, called the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. The choir sang it today. And the prayer captures this amazing vision of our transformation leading to the transformation of our community.

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace!

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.

Where there is injury, let us show pardon.

Where there is doubt, let us plant faith.

Where there is despair, let us bring hope.

Where there is darkness, let us shine light.

Where there is sadness, let us bring joy.

God, let us not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

We are transformed to be an agent of transformation in the world.

Once again, let's take a moment to pray...just a moment. Close your eyes if you wish now, take a deep breath, and I am going to lead us through the prayer of St. Francis. As I say the words, make them your own. Make this your own prayer to God now.

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace!

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.

Where there is injury, let us show pardon.

Where there is doubt, let us plant faith.

Where there is despair, let us bring hope.

Where there is darkness, let us shine light.

Where there is sadness, let us bring joy.

God, let us not seek as much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

And all God's people say: AMEN!

Do you want some very practical advice on how to live as a transformed person who is partnering with God to transform the community? Pray that prayer.

Do you want some more very practical advice? We'll go through it really quickly.

If you want to remember anything from this sermon, besides constipation, remember this acronym: BELLS. This is from work by the author Michael Frost.

BELLS stands for Bless, Eat, Listen to the Holy Spirit. Learn Jesus. And Sent.

B for BLESS. Next time you're in a meeting at work, stand up and say, "May the LORD bless you and keep you. May his face shine upon you..." No, I'm just kidding. Don't do that. That's weird. But you can bless someone in very simple and significant ways. Think back to those three people you prayed for. Pay someone a compliment. Say something encouraging to someone. Write someone a nice email, or send them an actual letter. Do an act of kindness for someone. Give someone a small gift. Bless someone outside the church walls this week.

E for EAT. You're going to eat 21 meals this week, give or take a few. Consider sharing one of those meals with the person you prayed for earlier. And not to quote Bible passages at them, but just to be a friend to someone who may be in great need. So that they get to spend time with someone who's life is being transformed by God. That's you.

L for Listen to the Holy Spirit. Listen to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a Person, the third person of the Trinity. He will speak to you and guide you, if you listen.

L for Learn Jesus. This is old early Christian phrase, that isn't used often. Instead we had, "What Would Jesus Do?" I don't know, "What would He do?" Learn Jesus by reading the Gospel stories, and knowing Jesus to find out. Be a samurai, as Pastor Dan preached.

S for SENT. Remember that we are sent people into the world. May we open our eyes to see all the ways in which God is working in the world and inviting us to join Him.

BELLS. If you are ambitious, there are a lot of new habits. Or, just pick one. Just like last week, choose one habit you would like to make progress on.

One final story as we consider what it is to be transformed people living out there as the aroma of Christ.

Someone in church recently shared this story with me, and I have their permission to share it, although I will use a totally fake name: John.

John and his wife, a couple from our church, moved into a retirement facility a number of months back. And John was having a particularly hard time with the transition. Moving out of their long-time home, and into a retirement facility filled with older people was hard, and it was depressing.

A member of our church prayer team, went to visit and pray for John and his wife in their new apartment at the retirement facility. And part of her prayer for John was this: "Lord, may John be a fragrance here in this retirement facility."

That night, John woke up in the middle of the night, and smelled the distinct scent of Pikake, the flower. He sniffed again, and even more powerfully, the smell of pikake. There was no pikake in the apartment, and there's not even any pikake on the whole property.

John goes back to sleep. In the morning, when his wife wakes up, John tells her the story. And she says to him, "John, you know the name of our type of unit in the building is Pikake."

And at that point, John recognized that God was getting his attention and telling him, and encouraging him, saying to him: "John, I am your God. And I want you here. In this place. You can make a difference and matter."

From that point on, John has embraced the difference that he and his wife can make as the sweet fragrance of Jesus among their new neighbors.

Just recently someone else visited John and his wife, not knowing this story. And they walked in, sniffed and said, "Gosh, it smells like Pikake."

*"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing Him. **15** For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;*

***16** to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? **17** For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as*

persons sent from God and standing in His presence."

What is God saying to you, and what does He want you to do about it? Close your eyes now if you prefer and we're going to close by silently reflecting on what God is saying to you and doing in you. Jesus is standing in front of you, looking at you, with great love and tenderness.

* * * * *

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