

**Theme: Transformation (final in culture of honour series)**

Readings: Romans 12:1 – 2, Luke 8:26-39

I wonder if anyone has a story of an aspect of your life that the Lord has transformed. I'm sure you do.

My brother in law spent around 35 years of his life as an addict. First he had issues with alcohol and drugs. Then gambling became a problem. And finally he ended up in gaol because he had committed fraud. He tried all kinds of ways to break those addictions. By sheer will power, he managed to stop some of the things ... for a while.

But he could stop permanently because the root cause had never been dealt with. The root cause was that he felt like a failure. He felt no-one could love him the way he was so he constantly pretended to be someone, something, else.

Then Jesus got hold of him. Jesus poured his love into him. Jesus set him free from his addictions. Some of that happened overnight and some of it he had to work hard on, with the help of supportive Christians.

My brother in law was almost completely transformed. Like you and I he still has some areas that the Lord is working on but he is a different person from who he used to be.

The word 'transformation' means total change. And not many of us like change. It's easy to see when someone else needs change; much more difficult for us to see that we too, need to be transformed.

For us, I believe, there are three arenas in which transformation needs to occur. I believe we as individuals are in need of change. I believe our church also needs transformation and that our society does too.

As individuals we are mostly okay. There are many good qualities evident in you – qualities I love. We all endeavour to follow Jesus and that's great. Yet I wonder sometimes what place that desire takes in our hearts – really. I want more of the Lord; I want his rulership to take precedence in my life.

And it doesn't always. Sometimes I want my life as it is, with a bit of Jesus added. His blessings. A sense of his presence. Give me my existing life with a dash of Jesus on the side. Don't ask me to change too much.

The story of Jesus and the possessed man illustrate every aspect of transformation you can think of. It is an important story, found in three places in the New Testament. Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39. Sure, some of the details vary but the guts of the story are the same.

You may wonder about demon possession. Earlier in the chapter Jesus mentions that some women have been delivered from the same thing. I don't want to focus on the problem – just to say that it still can occur today though it seems uncommon in the Western world.

Whatever was happening with the chap, he was completely out of it. The life he lived was an awful one. He couldn't function in any way. He was isolated and unwell – physically, mentally and spiritually.

This meant he lived alone in terrible conditions – ostracised from the community – because of his seizures, violence and nakedness. He is not someone you would want to run into on a dark night.

Jesus and the disciples arrive on the scene; the disciples already emotionally rung out! They'd come through a mighty storm! Jesus calmed that down and left them "terrified and amazed".

So they come, worn out, to this deeply troubled man. He posed a danger to the community and a danger to himself. Again Jesus sovereignly steps in.

Jesus casts out what was evil; thus making room for God. The man is able to come to himself; to become the one God intended him to be all along. Jesus takes away the disgrace he has carried for so long. His shame is gone. His humanity is restored. That is well worth checking out!

The people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. v35

They were afraid because this was a radical transformation! The guy was completely different – instead of harming his body, he was clothed.

Instead of living isolated in the tombs, he could join the community. That meant he could play his part socially and economically. He could lead a 'normal' life.

Jesus brought total transformation to that man. Jesus expected that transformation to impact the wider Jewish community. In Mark's version the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. However Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

And the man went away and did just that.

The people who heard his story were amazed. Transformation impacts the religious community. How is our church impacted by stories of transformation? What transformation does our church community need?

This is our final sermon on a Culture of Honour. Do we respect and care for each member of this community? Do we value relationships above rules or tradition? Are we honest with each other? Are we a community where it is safe for everyone to exercise their gifts? Is the Lord free to operate how he chooses in our midst?

One issue that still impacts some churches is that of sexism. The writer of Culture of Honour says: "The church is one of the last institutions in our society that practices sexism freely and 'biblically'. For some reasons it is still tolerated to dishonour or disempower women."

That's not true in this church. In fact we have the opposite problem in this female dominated place. Perhaps our men need to know they have the freedom to stand up and be the leaders we need them to be.

So what areas of our church life do need transforming? That can be a hard question to answer if you've been here a long time. We just are the way we are. Some of the more recent members are much more able to answer that question. Will we long-termers listen to the newer ones?

If we have a Culture of Honour we will not only listen. We will also want Jesus to transform the areas of our church life which do not please him and do not allow others to participate fully.

When Paul writes to the church at Rome, he tells them to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord. The church is familiar with sacrifice. The Jewish people offer sacrifices in the temple. Those who worship other gods also offer sacrifices. They might have sex with temple prostitutes or slaughter animals to placate their gods.

Paul is speaking to the church as a whole; more than he is talking to the individuals. He wants the body of Christ in Rome to know that the Lord wants transformation for the whole Christian community. Chapter 11 assures the Jews that God has not forgotten them. Paul assures the Gentiles they too are included in the Lord's plan for salvation. In the last verse Paul writes:

Everything comes from the Lord. All things were made because of him and will return to him. Praise the Lord forever! Amen.

In this context the church is to offer its corporate existence back to the Lord. The Christian community as a whole belongs to him. Every aspect of their individual and communal life belongs to him.

Paul writes in chapter 12:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship. NIV

Only when we say together "Here we are Lord, we offer you our total being", only then can the Lord really have his way in us.

When we do offer ourselves to him, he is well pleased.

The Loving God will accept our offering. Making this offering is a holy act. It pleases him. The Lord smiles when we truly want to belong to him and to no other.

And in return he offers us transformation in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes that transformation happens instantly. Much more often, it is a process which happens as we allow the Lord to change our thinking; to expand our narrow, self-centred point of view, to expand into the way of thinking he wants us to have.

Our pew Bible (CEV) puts it like this:

Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

You are probably more family with the NIV:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We must allow the Lord to renew, not just our individual minds, but our corporate minds. We must let him shape the way we think and that will change the way we live.

If the wider world looks at us, do they see us as any different to them? Or are we just as focused on financial independence; the good life? Are we just as individualistic as they are?

Paul told the church in Rome, that if they allowed the Lord to renew their minds; to change their thinking, they would understand God's will. They would know and be able to do, what pleased the Lord, if they let him transform their mind-set.

So what mind-sets that we have as a church need to change? Where have we become just like the culture around us?

Another quote from Culture of Honour:

“We must have permission in our church environments to challenge the sacred cows of our day, just as Jesus did. Remember Jesus came and confronted the Jews, the people of his day, who knew more about God than anyone. He rebuked their own love affair with their own interpretation of His Kingdom.” P199

So Jesus wants to transform individuals. Jesus wants to transform the church; our church as much as any other in the Western World.

He also wants to transform society as a whole. In fact all of creation needs transformation. The Lord promises this will happen. The book of Revelation is all about the Lord restoring, renewing, transforming all of creation so everything comes under his Lordship at it was created to be.

In the meantime, we need to keep asking ourselves the hard questions. We need to offer ourselves, as a body, a family, a church, to the Lord so that he can transform us into his likeness. We need to be praying together and respecting each other and what the Lord is doing in and through us all.

Together we can go out into God’s world and tell the people of what he has done and is doing, just as the demon-possessed man did.

### **Reflection questions**

Personal

What area in your life need a radical transformation?

How might the Lord change your thinking about those areas?

Who could you ask to pray for and support you?

If Jesus transformed your life, who would you want to tell about it?

Corporate

What areas in our church life needs a radical transformation?

How might the Lord change our thinking about those areas?

Whose prayer and support do we need in this?

Who are the people our church can reach with stories of Jesus’ transformation power?