

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: APRIL 30

REJOICING IN BEING TRANSFORMED, CHANGE AND BEING CHANGED

Paul writes to the church in Rome: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Romans 12.12.2).

Paul was a faithful apostle of Jesus, despite not having been one of the original Twelve. Apostle in Greek means "one who is sent." Paul, known as Saul, had his Damascus Road experience of being called by the risen Lord to repent, to return to God whom he was so zealous for, to be transformed from one who persecuted Christians to one who would himself be persecuted.

Paul could share the above words because this was his own experience. His mind had been transformed by Christ, re-newed in a way that would be useful and faithful. In order for Paul to be transformed, it was not enough for him to change his way of acting, he needed to be changed, which is a useful way of understanding being transformed.

This week I invite you to rejoice in the reality of how you have changed and been changed, been transformed...

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 1

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Paul not only had to acknowledge change, he had to be changed. He would change from a persecutor to a promoter, from one who had been trained to understand how God works in the world to one who now would translate for folks how God was now at work in the world.

A challenge for every human being is to adapt to change. Change is. That is a complete sentence and a complete truth: paradoxically, the only thing that stays the same is change. It doesn't make change any easier, but it does relativize its reality.

We are not the same person we were yesterday. We've lost skin cells, strands of our hair, perhaps even a memory or two. And we've gained as well: a new experience, a reminder of a treasure we hold physically or mentally. If we are not experiencing change, we are not alive. If we are not open to being changed, we have, essentially, given up on life, we have, as Paul says, become conformed to this world.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 2

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Is the process of accepting change and being changed scary? It can be, usually in relationship to how much we think/feel we will lose or have to give up in the process. Change is perceived as being negative in that it is more of a loss than a gain. And there is truth in this, especially as we age, for it often appears that the changes we experience most often are equated with losing something or even someone.

This can be especially true when we, or someone we love, is experiencing dementia of some kind. A person strong in body with a mind that is seemingly losing the ability to relate is confounding for us. In many cases, the person with dementia is often happy, it is those around them that are in distress.

If we are one of those persons who are in distress, one response can be to reset our heads and our hearts regarding expectations—our expectations. In doing so, we will find ourselves transformed, we will find ourselves being changed.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 3

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How do you think the folks in the church in Rome responded to Paul's exhortation? The letter to the Romans is different than others known to be of Paul's composition because he had not founded this community, in fact he had yet to visit them. The letter was written as an introduction ahead of his travels to see and be with them. Have you ever received a letter from someone exhorting you to do and be you had not met in person?

Paul stresses not only how life is to be embraced in the midst of change, but how his listeners are themselves to be changed. We are to be transformed, as he puts it. In his own life, he knew what it was like to have gone from one who persecuted persons in God's name to one who would be persecuted himself. While, thankfully, very few of us have to experience something similar as a result of being changed, we do have to experience being changed as a byproduct of transformation.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 4

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Paul writes so that those who hear him may “discern the will of God.” Heady stuff. Some might say impossible, or above my ability. Yet, Paul says his desire is for his listeners to do so: “may”, which is suggesting what God desires.

Discernment is a challenging word. A common meaning is: “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure”, and that’s not all that helpful. Discernment to me means the acquired or innate ability to understand what is meant regarding a subject. It can be as much of a why as a what.

Paul suggests that the path to practicing discernment lies in the unwillingness to be stuck, to be overly comfortable in our thoughts and practices. Paul is saying we are to be God-minded. Robert Kennedy is known for the following phrase: “Some (people) see things as they are and ask why. I dream things that never were and ask why not.” This is an example of God’s mind with respect to being transformed, being changed.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 5

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Paul writes to the church at Rome: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12.12.2).

This teaching is challenging: in discerning the will of God we will understand “what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Good and acceptable, okay. What does one do with the notion of perfect? Many of us have been taught that only God is perfect. Even gemstones are rated (and priced) based on their presentation of being as near perfect (but never perfectly perfect) as possible. If a gemstone, with clear guidelines even falls short, what about me or you?

Paul’s imploring requires us to take a different tact regarding “perfect.” The key is to seek to do the will of God, not be like God. Paul says to acquire this desire, one must be transformed, one must be changed, and that this being changed is part of God’s will.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 6

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Change is hard work because of the risk that is required. There is a statement regarding change that goes like this: "I'm all for change as long as someone else does it." And yet, change is. It is constant, and challenging, and yet without it we don't grow, we don't change. When we don't grow, we are on our way to being dead, or at least comatose.

People as they age often fall into two categories. They either take fewer risks or they begin to take (reasonable) risks, figuring why not? As I now resemble an aging person, I'm also aware that this is not an either/or choice. Where and how are you uncomfortable taking risks, embracing change? Where and how are you comfortable doing so?

An awareness of both is important, the former to be safe(er), the latter to explore where you might explore. To be transformed, to be changed, requires risk. Risk requires a willingness to try. Have you ever wondered how much God risks with you and me?

Thank you for rejoicing with me this week in the reality of how we have changed and been changed, been transformed...