

## TRANSFORMED AND TRANSFORMING

### Ezekiel 17:22-24

#### Intro

Our opening passage was articulated by the prophet during the time of exile when Jerusalem was conquered and the temple, the place where God was thought to abide, had become a glorified pile of stone. That's the reality. There is no question. There is no doubt. There is only the painful truth of a world that could seemingly care less.

It's out of that reality that a secure and more glorious than could ever be imagined future is articulated. There is no question. There is no doubt. There is only the truth of God that is to come (and it will. We may doubt, but God has promised and what God has promised, God will fulfill).

As Christians, we hear these words of God through the prophet and we immediately, and I believe appropriately, connect them to Jesus Christ.

But as we listen to what is said, the influence of this secure and glorious future goes a step further. And here's how: it is able to humble those who are puffed up and lift up those who have been beat down.

Said another way: the presence of Jesus in the world, affects the world. The presence of Jesus in our lives, transforms us into who we were created to be. The scripture reads this way.

### Ezekiel 17:22-24

22 Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup> On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. <sup>24</sup> All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.

I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.

### II Corinthians 5:5-10

#### Intro

The second passage picks up that thread of that transformation and continues to carry it forward by boldly declaring the transformation has been prepared for us by God.

It's not happenstance. It's not a mistake.

You are a child of God and as a child of God we are able to step forward into our life in the world with confidence knowing that as God works in and through us, we will be granted everything we need. As we have talked about before, that doesn't mean that we will be comfortable with the direction that God has placed before us, but our Holy Parent will not lead us to decay. Even in hardship the grace of God will bestow upon us all that we need. It is through these steps of faith, yes, even wavering faith, that transformation emerges.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that for yourself? Do you believe that for our community? Do you believe that for the Church? The scripture reads this way.

## **II Corinthians 5:5-10**

<sup>5</sup>He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

<sup>6</sup> So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—<sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup>For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

### **“Transformed and Transforming”**

So the last 10 plus days have been filled. They have been filled with uplifting moments of joy and celebration...and they have been filled with occasions that caused me to grieve, and yes, get upset.

The first six days or so were filled with the business of the church. Linda Santa-Lucia, Chris Heitkamp and yours truly were among a gathering of people out in Grand Rapids, Michigan for the annual meeting of the Reformed Church in America.

There was so much of it that was good: we elected and installed a new denominational leader...who was born to a non-religious family in Nicaragua before moving to Canada as a refugee where he was ultimately professed his faith in Jesus through a Pentecostal church, before being led by God to the Reformed Church where he has been serving as a pastor and church planter for the last 20 plus years (yup, the ‘if it ain’t dutch, it ain’t much’ denomination, just got a whole lot more diverse!). We were able to worship and work with the members of our sister denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, and talked about ways that we might continue to work more in concert with one another. And we were able to celebrate the many ways that God has worked through our greater church to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the hopeless (as an example, there was a clip from St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands showing the sort of work (including your specific work) that several of you were able to participate in back in February: y’all did good work!).

And then there was the other stuff: our denomination is bitterly divided and were it not for wise leadership to create a vision group to find a way to stay together, radically restructure, or orderly separate (which is in the process of being formed and will offer its direction to the general synod in 2020), I very much feel that we may have been without a denominational home. As was mentioned two weeks ago, this division is over the issue of human sexuality. The fear and distrust is so great that there was a motion that was made that instructed all classis (our regional group of churches) to verify that there are no seated classis members who were living in a same-sex relationship, that none of the congregations had allowed a same sex wedding to occur on their grounds or in their sanctuary, and that no ministers under classis responsibility have officiated a same-sex wedding. If any of these things took place, then that entire classis would not be allowed to participate in the next denominational meeting. So, you know, our classis runs the spectrum of opinion on this issue...which means we would not have been allowed to be seated, along with almost every other classis from here to Albany.

It is heartbreaking.

It’s like that.

Then I came home and I immediately hopped into preparations for a birthday. I don't know if you've heard: there's a certain young man who turns 13 today? Is there anyone here who turns 13?

Yeah, it's like that, and that is so much fun and absolutely a celebration.

And, because of the life that he has, that we have, birthdays are also hard and bittersweet...most of you understand what I am talking about so I will simply leave it at that.

As I wrote this sermon I couldn't help but feel more than a little bit of whiplash. Feeling good and positive to being upset and sad...back and forth. Wondering what I have to do to have an idea to navigate these days that are before me...which seem to be the norm nowadays?

And I know that it's not just me. Maybe for you that whiplash is because of your job, something that's going on in your family, maybe it's because you really don't know what you believe (and therefore how to live) in regard to this whole 'walking in faith' thing that you hear from this (and hopefully) many other pulpits.

We look around and think, 'I can't do this anymore. I'm not sure where to go from here. I don't know what to do'.

When you're in that sort of a place, these passages remind us of the foundation that we are built upon. But not only a foundation, but a direction in regards to how we live with one another, with ourselves, with God.

What does God tell us?

'Walk, not by sight, but by faith with the one whom I plant, for through him the low will be lifted up and those who are wilted will spring forth with life'.

At Synod there were more than a few times when we heard that there is a difference between hearing and listening; believing and having faith. We are all here today so at some level we have heard and even believe.

But are we listening? Are we hearing what is said and taking it in so that what we believe is led to become a faith that lifts us up even in those times when we don't know what to do? Do we not just know that God can ...but know that He will... not only for others, but absolutely for us as well?

And you've heard me say before and I'm going to say it again, just because you are walking by faith doesn't mean that the walk is without stubble or pitfall. That was never promised to us, and we should not expect it.

But what we have been promised is that through the Spirit of the one who was planted like a solitary sprig, we have an eternal home that is so much more glorious than this earthly realm.

We need to be reminded of this. Because the world is hard. Loved ones get sick, sometimes unexpectedly so. Relationships that we thought were solid start to crack, and we aren't sure how to stop the fissure. Celebrations take place...and I end up wondering how many more there will be. Life is hard. Life can be really messed up.

So what do we do? How do we walk?

Do we walk in such a way that we see the very real troubles of life, and begin to think in some manner or form “I don’t know what to do”?

Or do we walk by faith, living a life that has been transformed?

Our world can change around us, sometimes in ways that feel scant more than in instant. Sometimes we have been waiting and even anticipating the change. Other moments the change is something that we want to have no part of. All of it, the change, and the mundane, all of it is a part of our lives.

How will we approach it?

With eyes firmly affixed upon the world, which, at times, cause to question where to step next?

Or as a people who have been transformed and are in the midst of transforming, who are now able to see and experience the world, even with all of its pitfalls, with eyes of faith?

Allow today to be the day where you live in that space of transformation.

You who are about to begin something new: let this be a day of transformation.

You who are in a place where everything you experience has been faced before: let this be a day of transformation.

You who are struggling, in any and every way: let this be a day of transformation.

You who feel like you don’t have a care in the world: let this be a day of transformation.

You are mourning: let this be a day of transformation.

You who are celebrating: let this be your day of transformation.

As I look at the denomination, what I now see quite clearly, is work that needs to be done, to inform, discover, and prepare. Because here’s the reality: we need to focus on why God called us to be in community in the first place (“Go and make disciples”), and that work can be done regardless of the name on a sign.

As for the celebration that was mentioned: that is where my focus will abide, because God has blessed us with this day. Austin: Happy Birthday!

We gather together in this place because we have heard and we believe.

Let us move from this place as a people who are listening and see the world in such a way that we truly walk by faith. Children of God, hear and listen. Believe and have faith. Children of God, listen to that still small voice of God’s Spirit whispering into your reality. Listen, respond, be transformed!

### **After Sermon Prayer**

The world can be so hard, God. You know that too well. But You have promised that even out of great distress, a shoot will take hold which will grant us everything that we need to step forward in faith. We thank You for Jesus and for how he grants us everything we need to let this be the day of transformation, where we no longer walk by sight, but instead by faith. It is in his name that we do pray. Amen.