

Sunday, May 17, 2015

Good Morning, Did you know that it was this Sunday that I had planned to deliver a message on how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah but once again I sort have got things mixed up a bit. You see today is Ascension Sunday and next Sunday is Pentecost and I thought it was important that we cover these two events in our messages for this week and the next. Now I have not forgotten about our message on how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah and plan to deliver it on the Sunday after Pentecost. Over the past few months we have found ourselves on a spiritual journey, which started with Ash Wednesday, then Good Friday, then Jesus' burial and then Easter. But our spiritual journey did not stop at Easter as we have journeyed on after Easter to experience events like Jesus on the Road to Emmaus and when Jesus instructed His disciples to "go and make disciple of all nations". During last weeks Mother's Day service I noticed something special about our Opening Prayer. What I noticed was the simplicity in describing what affects the events of before Easter and the events of after Easter have had on all of us. To help us remember what last week opening pray was about I would like to read it for us once again, "***Holy God, You make us Easter people – a people transformed by the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. Your first and final word to us is Love. You reach out to us, offering joy and wholeness. Yet we often greet your resurrection by grieving at the tomb, doubting the good news we hear or quaking in fear as we hide in our upper rooms. Still, You call us deeper into Easter, answering our resistance with Your loving presence. You claim us as your friends. As we gather now to worship, teach us once more to abide in Your love, that our joy may be complete. Amen***". Before we move on I would like to reemphasize a key phrase in our prayer, "***a people transformed by the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus***". You see today's message is about our transformation from who we were to who we have become as followers of Jesus. So let's go back and take a closer look at some historical events to see what happened that led up to this wonderful transformation of ours. Well to begin with we know that Jesus did walk this earth for 40 days after His resurrection. We know that Jesus did appear to the disciples where He prepared them to spread the good news. We know that Jesus displayed his wounds so Thomas, who doubted that it was Jesus, could put his finger into the hole of Jesus' hand and his hand into the wound in Jesus' side. We know that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one gathering. We even know that there was even a time that Jesus helped the disciples, who had been fishing all night without a single catch, to bring in a catch so large the disciples were amazed that the nets didn't tear. We

know that Jesus taught his disciples how to continue on and for them to wait together in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to empower them. Now let's pause for a moment, to think about how all of these appearances may have transformed the faith of those who experienced them. I wonder what that must have been like for those who were there, to realize that Jesus had overcome death and to see it with their own eyes. What a powerful thing to witness. I'm sure their faith was never the same after seeing what they saw in the resurrection of Jesus. I have often thought how easy it must have been for those who were there to be transformed and believe and have faith in Jesus. I also had a second thought that I wished I could have seen Jesus, face to face, and then I would be like Thomas, after Jesus appeared to him, instantly transformed with the knowledge of Jesus' love and guidance in our lives. But the hard truth of the matter is that we who have not lived to witness and walk hand in hand with Jesus have a bit more difficulty with our transformation. Isn't it easier to believe in something or someone that you can physically see with our own eyes? So, without seeing the actual physical Jesus where do we start to begin our transformation? I believe our best example of being transformed is the story of Paul. You see Paul was not as fortunate as the other disciples in that His transformation came about after Jesus had ascended up into heaven. But before we get into Paul's transformation let's visit Luke's account in the Book of Acts of the day that our Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven from this earth. In the first chapter of Acts, verses 6-11 we find

“So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”
7 He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
9 After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. 10 As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Can you imagine being with someone one minute and then not being with them the next? So if I were one of Jesus' disciples and I just witnessed Him being lifted up to

heaven what kind of thinking would be going on in my mind. Would there be thoughts like, "Is He coming back?" or "What do I do now, without Him?" But beside those thoughts I know I would have feelings of being surprised and being amazed at the same time. Not only would I have seen Jesus rise into the clouds but I would also have seen the two white-robed men standing among the disciples. Now looking from a viewpoint of the disciples the ascension of Jesus is bringing to close a chapter in their lives where they were being prepared to continue on with Jesus' message. And now it is sort of like a graduation when you're no longer in school but have been sent out into the world. And this was just what had happened to Jesus' disciples. In fact we could look at what Jesus said to them right before He ascended as a sort of commencement address to the first graduating class of disciples. In His last words to the disciples He informed them of the gift of the Holy Spirit that was coming to them. Sort of like being given a set of tools before you start your new job. But Jesus gave them more than just a set of tools; He gave them their purpose in this world. He told them that they would be His witnesses and they were to tell everyone about Him. They now had a career of serving others and bringing hope to the hopeless, bringing faith to unbelievers and bringing God's love to those who felt no love in this world. But you know something, we were maybe not as fortunate as the first disciples were, as we never had the chance to walk across the graduation platform and personally shake Jesus' hand. You see we are blessed in a way that we will receive our tools and purpose without actually seeing Jesus' physical presence. So how do we know this? We know this because of the example that Paul set before us. What we have in common with Paul is that he too never had the chance to walk across that graduation platform and personally shake Jesus' hand. By any chance has anyone been watching the TV series "AD: The Bible Continues? I have and what I have noticed most is there seems to be a "Coincidence; Wink! Wink!" between the Series and my messages since Easter. Through my messages I have presented what I would call, "The After Easter Stories" like Peter running to the empty tomb, or Jesus on the road to Emmaus, or Jesus appearing to Thomas. And what is amazing is when I watch the TV series it has been matching to my messages sort of week by week. But this week something is a bit different, you see previously I have written my messages before watching the TV Series. However, this week as I was deciding to write about Paul guess who showed up in the TV series. Yep, Paul showed up. You know as I have previously read about Paul I understood him to be a persecutor of Christians and arresting them whenever he could. But after watching the TV Series I now have a better idea of how ruthless

Paul really was. Paul's ambition to eradicate the Christians was inner driven with no mercy or compassion to the Christians he was tormenting. Even Paul's involvement in the stoning of Stephen showed just how extreme he was. So, who better, would it be, for Jesus to change a life than to change Paul's life? We know from Acts 9 the story where Jesus meets Paul on the road to Damascus. And it was on this road that Paul was blinded by a bright light and heard these words, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Paul replies, "Who are you Lord", then Jesus answers, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting". And it was from that moment on that Saul's life was turned upside down. Being blinded by the light, Saul, with the help of fellow travelers goes to Damascus to meet up with Ananias. Ananias was afraid to meet with Saul because of his harsh reputation as an evil man. But the Lord told Ananias the Saul was a "chosen instrument" and was to carry Jesus' message to the Gentiles. So when we talk about transformations they don't get any better than this. So what can we learn from Paul's transformation? We can learn that God's saving grace in Jesus can save anyone, no matter how bad or evil they have become. So now back to the question, "So, without seeing the actual physical Jesus where do we start to begin our transformation?" We start by making ourselves available to be transformed. All we need is an open mind with an open heart that will allow God to transform our lives into the lives He would be pleased for us to live. And there is even hope for some, like Paul, that God will present Himself in such a way that they will choose to receive God's saving grace and turn to a life following Jesus. As I stated earlier, "You see today's message is about our transformation from who we were to who we have become as followers of Jesus." And God has provided us with many wonderful success stories to guide us in our journey. First, God provided Jesus to carry our sins to the cross so we could be forgiven and have a new life. Second, God provided disciples who would see their lives changed in the presence of Jesus. And third, we see that God changed Saul's life of evil to Paul's life of faith. I would like to close our message today by leaving us with three attributes of how we can tell if our lives have been transformed. A transformed life restores our faith in God along with our hope for others to know of His love too. A transformed life brings us to the bible where we hear the Word of God guiding our lives. And a transformed life instills in us a mission to share the Good News of Jesus to all we meet. So for this coming week, take some time to reflect on your life, a life transformed by God's loving grace in Jesus Christ. Amen.

John 14:19-21

19 “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

John 14: 25-28

25 “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. 28 You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming *back* to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said,^[e] ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.