

Marti McMahon Stanley  
Norwalk Christian Church  
November 15, 2015

### Transformation

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

**17** Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. **19** They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** That is not the way you learned Christ! **21** For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. **22** You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

**25** So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. **26** Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and do not make room for the devil. **28** Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. **29** Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,<sup>[a]</sup> as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. **31** Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, **32** and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.<sup>[b]</sup> **5 1** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, **2** and live in love, as Christ loved us<sup>[c]</sup> and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Putting away the old self and rules for growth into new life. That sounds easy, we'll just follow the rules that \_\_\_\_\_ just read and we're done. Well... Only it's not that simple. If we just had new rules to follow for salvation or better living, we would do it. That would be a simple and easy choice. But this list isn't THE list for us to abide by. The purpose of life isn't to follow rules. Our whole life is meant to be so much more. To be transformed into someone who reflects God and Christ. And when we do

that, we've been transformed. Yes, we live by these rules, but through transformation we become so much more than a rule follower.

Just like The Very Hungry Caterpillar we read about, it takes us a little time, but then we push our way out, stripping away the old and become transformed into someone beautiful. Someone who others want to be around. Someone who builds others up. Someone who others think of as love, patience, goodness. Someone that is a safe place for others.

Our children and youth, especially our youth, have heard me preach a hundred times on this building being a safe place, on them being safe places for people, and on all our spaces (on or off church property) being safe places for everyone. That no one is ever to be bullied, no one is ever to feel less than or unworthy. Things that are said are confidential unless there's going to be harm to anyone. Basic human dignity and respect is not just met, but showered in grace and love. They know and understand the expectations of a safe space. They also know we love them enough to enforce those rules. But once they begin to experience a need and appreciate a space that is free from judgement, free for ridicule, free from harm or hatred, they begin to appreciate the standards that were set.

As a church, the expectations of a safe space is something we should all automatically be doing. You know that already, which is why the Code of Ethics was voted in as rules we as a church, as leaders within the church, and as individuals in this church should follow. The spaces we each fill

shouldn't just be filled with rule abiders, they should be filled with people who have been transformed. People who not only treat others with dignity and respect, but people who care about others. People who want to do what is right. People who want to encourage and support others. People who want to show grace and love. People who know this space might be the only space the other person ever gets to experience God.

Now yes, in the beginning, when we first start out, these rules, they guide us and our behaviors. But then, then the Spirit inside us begins to take control. And our actions become a reflection of who we've become, of who we are transformed to be. And not just as individuals, but as a whole. That's one of the beauties of a church body. We live amongst each other and work beside each other, but once we've been transformed this beautiful thing happens, we begin to care. Not just on the surface care, but we truly care. We grieve with each other, we rejoice with each other. We pray for one another, and genuinely love each other. We take on God's image, the image of Christ and we make that very real presence present in our world today.

This week after the bloodshed erupted in Paris, I saw a picture of Parisians flooding the streets and holding up a sign that read NOT AFRAID. After horrible attacks the people of France didn't all run home and grieve alone. They came together, wept together, and were transformed together by this experience. Even after this horrible experience, people of all demographics came together, arm in arm, continuing to live life together. There filling the

streets they saw each as a person, extended hands and joined together. Together they are stronger, together they aren't afraid.

We do this, joining together, well at certain times in our lives. When people get baptized, place membership, get married or have a baby, we as a church agree to share in life with them. We acknowledge we cannot go through life alone, we need the support and encouragement of a community. It's not just in those big life moments that we need to come together and show our support for each other. It's the everyday in between times, the living of life, where we see if we're stuck simply following rules, or if we are guided by a passion that is instilled within us to help others and put others in such a safe place that they have no question as to whether they are loved and valued.

Let us be transformed and they will know that we are Christians. By our love, all unity may one day be restored. By our love, transformation happens, not solely in ourselves, but in the world around us. When we extend genuine unconditional love, transformation occurs all around. We are not bound to our old selves, we CAN break free from whatever is holding us back, for together we can do so much more than we give ourselves credit for. Imagine the people of God. Our imaginations can take us even farther than our dreams. We CAN live a new life, one transformed by love and grace. One that displays the fruits of the Spirit, one that is a reflection of God, one that is Christ alive in our world today.

God, may we be transformed people. Transformed by experiencing you and accepting that transformation into our lives. And may our transformation enable us to imagine all the people we are able to serve in love and humility. Amen.