

Christ Community Covenant Church
Healthy Things Grow - "Life Transforming Walk With Jesus"
Pastor Gloria Merritt – June 22, 2014

I. Opening Comments

As we have been going through this sermon series of the ten missional markers of a healthy church, we hope that you will participate in this process that we've been mentioning each week. On July 20, there will be a lunch after church that will bring us together and allow us to hear from Brent Thompson, a pastor from our denomination that is leading this discussion in many churches. He will help us as the question, "how are we doing in becoming a healthy church?" We really, really ask you to come that day, plan to stay for lunch and join the conversation.

So far, we've talked about Heartfelt Worship and its importance both individually and corporately. We've talked about having a focus of evangelism; we've talked assessing ourselves in the area of God's word — is it central in our church and in our lives? Last week Dave talked about living and giving. Remember, he said we should be sacrificial givers (meaning givers)? And, he wasn't talking about being organ donors! He preached about the church's need to be compassionate and to attend to the social needs around us. Next week Scott Parr is going to lead us in the area of having a global perspective, and we'll also hear from the Puerto Rico team. But, today the thing that we want to focus on is **having a transforming walk with Jesus — having a walk that shows evidence that we have changed because of the power of Christ in us.**

If you are a visitor with us today, or if you have just started coming to 4Cs in recent months, I want to say that we do hope you feel very welcome with us, we hope that you find us to be loving and caring, but I also want to say that we hope you will join us in believing the things we speak about. We do believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We do believe that the Bible is true and is our perfect guide for teaching us who God is. We hope you will come to know Christ more fully while we are together.

Before we go any further, let's pray a prayer together that has been written specifically for us in this process of becoming a healthier church. Please pray this prayer together with me.

Heavenly Father, we bow down before you this morning, submitting ourselves to your will, and humbly asking you to lead us deeper in Christ, and further in His mission.

Lord Jesus, we invite you into our hearts that You would change us from the inside out into your own likeness, that we would no longer conform to the standards of this world, but would be transformed as You renew our minds.

Holy Spirit, increase our attention to the whispering of our Lord so we may see and hear and understand His good and perfect will, seeking Him first and above all else.

We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

You may have heard in that prayer some phrases that will get us started. Phrases like "changing us from the inside out into your own likeness, that we would no longer conform to the standards of this world." That's taken directly from Romans 12:2, which says "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds..." The process of transformation is an interesting one to consider. If I were to sing, "Trans-form-ers....." how does it go? (more than meets the eye) — (commercial theme song) "More than meets the eye." That, my friends, is a very spiritual statement! Transformation is definitely more than what our eyes can see. It begins in the heart, which means we we don't always see the transformation taking

place until we look back and see, “wow, I truly am different, I am more Christlike than I was before.”

Think for a moment — who do you know that has been radically transformed by Christ's power? Someone who changed quite dramatically because of being born again? Maybe you would say, “I have! I have!” The hope would be that we could all say that, even to a certain extent. In fact, how have you been radically transformed by Christ's power?

As you think about that, I want to share both some bad news and some good news. I'll give you the bad news first. Sadly, the culture around us would suggest that Christians aren't all that transformed from the rest of the world. As Christians, we are judged harshly by the world, and at times it is deserved. On the other hand, the world doesn't understand that Christians are broken people who have come to Christ in an acknowledgement of their brokenness. But, as we grow in Christ, it's easy to become Pharisaical and hypocritical. You see, according to Gallup polls and sociologists, one of the greatest scandals of our day is that “evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered and sexually immoral as the world in general.” For example, these statistics tell us that:

- Church members divorce their spouses as often as their secular neighbors.
- Church members are involved in domestic abuse as often as their neighbors.
- Church members' giving patterns indicate they are almost as materialistic as non-Christians.
- White evangelicals are the most likely people to object to neighbors of another race.
- Church members engage in premarital and extramarital sex.

This was only shared in the interest of time allowance:

[Graham Cyster, a Christian from South Africa, recently told a painful story about a personal experience two decades ago when he was struggling against apartheid as a young South African evangelical. One night, he was smuggled into an underground Communist cell of young people fighting apartheid. "Tell us about the gospel of Jesus Christ," they asked, half hoping for an alternative to the violent communist strategy they were embracing.

Graham gave a clear, powerful presentation of the gospel, showing how personal faith in Christ wonderfully transforms persons and creates one new body of believers where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, rich nor poor, black nor white. The youth were fascinated. One seventeen-year-old exclaimed, "That is wonderful! Show me where I can see that happening." Graham's face fell as he sadly responded that he could not think of anywhere South African Christians were truly living out the message of the gospel. "Then the whole thing is a piece of sh—," the youth angrily retorted. Within a month he left the country to join the armed struggle against apartheid—and eventually giving his life for his beliefs.

The young man was right. If Christians do not live what they preach, the whole thing is a farce. "American Christianity has largely failed since the middle of the twentieth century," Barna concludes, "because Jesus' modern-day disciples do not act like Jesus. This scandalous behavior mocks Christ, undermines evangelism, and destroys Christian credibility.]

However, here is some good news: deeply committed Christians do live differently. Do you remember several years back when Dave said we could be “super sheep?” Well, we're talking about super sheep Christians — those who believe the Bible to be true and apply what it says to their lives, Christians who are engaged in tithing and giving to the poor, Christians who are committed to church attendance, and small groups or Bible studies, and committed to prayer. They have a personal relationship with Jesus. These people who take discipleship, or following Christ, seriously also enjoy significantly lower divorce rates than mere church members, the general public, and unbelievers.

These are encouraging things to hear, and it is my hope and prayer that we are all on the path towards being deeply committed Christians whose lives are transformed because of the way we spend our time investing in a relationship with Christ.

I'd like for everyone to get out a Bible, either the one you brought with you, or one from the pew, or your phone, if you prefer. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 3:18.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

This says we ARE being transformed in His likeness, but how does that happen? Of course, the obvious answer is that we become like someone by spending time with that person. And one of the easiest ways to be transformed by renewing our minds is by being in the word of God — after all, one of the names of Christ is that He is the Living Word. Let's dwell on some scripture right now by looking at Ephesians 4, starting in verse 11. These words speak a lot about what transformation should look like. As we read these words, we're going to especially take notice of all the verbs — all of the action words that are mentioned.

Ephesians 4:11-5:21 (NIV)

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ***[we see here that God provides Leaders to help His church grow and mature and that it is an ongoing process. We are to know Christ more and more, day by day, just as we would better come to know our spouses, or family members, or friends.]***

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. ***[Part of our growth means that we will think differently than the world does, because our thoughts are going to be shaped by scripture.]***

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. **18** They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. **19** Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. ***[These verbs tell us what NOT to do — don't live as they do, don't be darkened, or separated, or hardened, and don't indulge in a life of impurity.]***

[In the next several paragraphs, we'll see positive verbs telling us what we'll look like as we are transformed.]

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned **21** when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. **22** You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **23** to be made new in the attitude of your minds; **24** and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. **26** "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. **28** Anyone who has been stealing must steal no

longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Continuing in Chapter 5 there is more description of what a transformed life looks like, how we should speak, how we should be free from greed, how our marriages should function, and more about family life. But look at verse 10. It's a rather stunning summary of this. It's the heart of the matter!

[Chapter 5

1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children **2** and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **3** But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. **4** Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. **5** For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. **7** Therefore do not be partners with them. **8** For you were once darkness, ***[this suggests that change has already taken place, that the process of transformation has begun]*** but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)]. **10** and find out what pleases the Lord. ***[I love this phrase, because it suggests that we go on a quest, a hunt to discover what pleases God.]***

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. **12** It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. **13** But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. **14** This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity. ***in other words, don't be in the habit of wasting the time we have]*** because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. **18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. **19** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **21** Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wow. That's a lot, isn't it? And, you know what? The person that wrote these words had seen a LOT of change in his life! He was formerly a murderer, a persecutor of the Church. He had a list of credentials a MILE long, and he had reason to be the Pharisee of all Pharisees. Paul's life demonstrates to us that it doesn't all happen immediately, it happens over time. But, just as we look at the plant kingdom and see how rain, and sunshine, and good soil, and fertilizer, etc., make for incredibly healthy fruit and flowers, it's easy to see that we need to attend to our own transformation by utilizing all of the resources God gives, things like — joining a Bible study or a Community Group, or coming to Male Call. Adopt a Bible reading plan — there are boatloads of them available on your smart phones. And, make prayer a regular part of your day. All of these things are means that God gives us to know Him.

Take a look at these slides PHOTOS — (four slides about 68 milliseconds)

- 68 milliseconds
- The average time it takes for the human brain to react.
- The time it takes for what is inside of you to come out.

A complacent ear — **or an obedient heart**; A sarcastic retort — **or a gentle response**; fear of the future — **or resting in His promises**. What is in you will come out so... **Let the Word dwell in you.**

Matthew 12:34 says “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” That’s why we need transformation. We need heart surgery and mind surgery.

As a way to do that, I’ve prepared a little tool for you. If you’ll look in your bulletins, you’ll find a folded white piece of paper with Psalm 119 printed on it. There are 22 sections of Psalm 119, because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. I love to use this Psalm as a way to pray as I have my quiet times with the Lord. These are words that all Jewish children were taught to use on a daily basis. We can be pretty certain that these words were used by the Lord Jesus himself as he was growing and maturing. So, if you can remember to do so, by programming your phone, or whatever, use one section of this 3 different times during your day, or use 3 of them at one time in your day. I promise that if you do this, you’re going to find a change taking place in your hearts! This is your homework for this week.

Offering Prayer

Benediction

As we close today, please get out the copy of Psalm 119 and look at the very last section. It’s the Hebrew letter TAW, starting with verse 169. Let’s pray it together:

- 169** May my cry come before you, LORD;
give me understanding according to your word.
- 170** May my supplication come before you;
deliver me according to your promise.
- 171** May my lips overflow with praise,
for you teach me your decrees.
- 172** May my tongue sing of your word,
for all your commands are righteous.
- 173** May your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.
- 174** I long for your salvation, LORD,
and your law gives me delight.
- 175** Let me live that I may praise you,
and may your laws sustain me.
- 176** I have strayed like a lost sheep.
Seek your servant,
for I have not forgotten your commands.

Have a beautiful week.