

A Transformed Disciple
John 21:15-19
Sunday, May 17, 2020
6th Sunday of Eastertime
Pre-recorded Message

Pride, arrogance, self-righteousness, egotistical know-it-alls, who actually know very little; snobs. These are unbecoming characteristics of people. According to CS Lewis, pride is the worst sin of the seven deadly sins of anger, greed, envy, lust, gluttony, and laziness. (Mere Christianity, Chapter 8, 1952) This is because when pride is mixed in with any other sin, it makes the behavior worse and much harder to change.

For instance, a person can be lazy, one of the seven, and that means that they don't work diligently or with a sense of excellence. They can be selfish couch potatoes who have a very little gumption or desire to achieve or accomplish something. But if you add pride into that sin, laziness takes on a whole new level of sinfulness. A prideful lazy person will justify their behavior by expecting other people to do what they are responsible for. They may not be willing to learn new skills, nurture their abilities. They are more apt to want to keep the status quo and not want to see any change because that would mean more work. They create unrealistic expectations for those they manage or lead if they happen to be in these kinds of roles. They may focus on the easy stuff and draw from their position or title or rank and be more charming than substance. A prideful lazy person can be fault finding and critical of people who work for them. They have a strong sense of entitlement because of their position. They look for scapegoats and blame others for problems that their laziness has created. Yes, a prideful lazy person is very difficult to work or live with.

You add pride into any sinful behavior or attitude and that behavior or attitude becomes magnified and multiplied into a web of problems.

The antidote to such problems is Christ. If a person turns their heart, soul, mind, and life over to Christ, then these kinds of sins begin to weaken and eventually will be washed away or transformed into more Christ-like behaviors and attitudes. Jesus died for these sins, will forgive them and pour love into a person. If someone allows this to happen to them, they will experience a transformation. A prideful person when they surrender themselves over to Christ will eventually become a less prideful person and eventually a humble person.

We can see this kind of transformation in Peter, the main character in our gospel lesson today. Peter transforms from a self-righteous, competitive, arrogant person to a humble person over the course of his life. In order to see this, we'll have to look at the scriptures more closely.

It is commonly said that this passage from John 21 is where Jesus reconciles his relationship with Peter. Since Peter denied knowing Jesus three times the night he was

arrested and tried, Peter needed to have the opportunity to pledge his love to Christ three times.

But there is something more going on here and to see it, we need to have a little Greek lesson!

John reports that when Jesus asked Peter if he loves him the first two times, the word Jesus used was agape for love. Peter's response was that he loves Jesus but Peter used the word phileo for love. There is a difference between agape love and phileo love. Agape love is the deepest kind of love. It's unconditional, self-sacrificing, godly or holy love. Phileo love speaks to the human bond of friendship. Phileo love matures into agape love.

The third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, Jesus uses the word "phileo" and Peter cries out, "Lord, you know all things; you know I love you." Peter uses the phileo word in this response.

This is the "ah-ha" moment revealing Peter's transformed character.

How is this so? Let's take a little time travel trip back to the last night Jesus spent with his disciples. After Judas Iscariot left, Jesus told the disciples that he would be leaving them and where he was going, they could not follow him. (John 13:33-38)

Jesus knew they would all run away once he was arrested. This is why he said they couldn't follow him. Jesus knows how much courage they have; he knows how much fear they have; he knows how much integrity they have; he knows how self-serving they are. He expected the disciples to run when he was arrested.

Then Peter asks Jesus specifically about following him and Peter says, "I will lay down my life for you." Jesus' response to Peter, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

The rest is history.

What Peter says reveals his egotistical, self-righteous attitude. "I will lay down my life for you." It's not the first time we've seen this kind of brashness, but it may be the last time.

Here we see living proof that Christ chooses imperfect people to serve him; imperfect people to even lead his church. With so much angst and pride, Peter wants to set himself apart from the other disciples. He is "destined for great things" as the rock of the church. Pride and power are infused into his character and personality. Yet Jesus chose him to be the rock of his church. Jesus knows Peter better than Peter knows himself.

But how does this event reveal Peter's transformed character? There are two pieces of evidence I can show you.

The first is that Peter doesn't use the stronger term "agape" to describe his love for Christ. The old arrogant Peter would have used that word freely, because it was the 'best' form

of love. When Peter promised to lay down his life, he didn't really mean it. It was his pride that birthed that pledge.

Now when Jesus asks him if he loves him, Peter uses the word for love, *phileo*, that reflects what is truly in his heart. There is humbleness there now with the truth. Peter realized that his love for Christ wasn't as strong as he thought it was. He is maturing in a humble spirit.

The second piece of evidence is when Peter says, "Lord, you know all things..." after Jesus uses the term "*phileo*" the third time he asks him about his love. Peter understands now that Jesus does know him better than he knows himself. It was a humbled, transformed Peter who could say, Lord, you know me better than I know myself.

By now you may be saying, well Pastor, that's pretty interesting, but so what? What does that have to do with me?

Friends we are all undergoing transformations. We can be transformed into the person God created us to be, loving the way Jesus loves us. Or we can be transformed by the world and its arrogant, sinful, self-serving ways.

Every single one of us has the opportunity to be transformed one way or the other. In this story we can see the depth of Christ's love. John told the story about Nicodemus needing to be born from the Spirit. That God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die for all of our sins. God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn us. God sent Jesus into the world to save us.

In this scene on the beach, we see Jesus being compassionate, generous, and merciful toward his disciples and Peter. If he wasn't the Christ, he would have wanted revenge or been angry or condemned them for their lack of faith, courage, and devotion.

Peter doesn't experience Christ's condemnation, not even his disappointment. What we've seen is a contrite, humble servant Peter. Someone who is running off the boat to meet up with Jesus. Someone who goes to the boat to get the extra fish Jesus asks for. In this situation, Peter experiences the depth of Christ's forgiveness and the joy of reconciliation all while he matures as a humble servant of Christ. Peter has made huge strides in maturity through Christ's death and resurrection and appearances.

Friends, Jesus has this same love for us too!

Do you need Christ's forgiveness for a character flaw? Do you need Jesus to forgive you for a sin against another person or our society? You can meet Christ in the same way that Peter did. Confess your sin, repent, and ask Jesus to forgive you and help you to become more like him in your character and ways of loving people and God.

You will experience all kinds of freedom if you do this. Freedom from sin, guilt, shame. Open yourselves up to Christ's love and you too will experience his unconditional love for you.

If you think you are “too far” gone, please remember the parable of the Prodigal Son. God is waiting to receive you, with arms open wide and ready to celebrate your awakening.

Jesus accepted Peter where he was, with phileo love, not the agape love, because phileo love with truth is more honorable than false, prideful claims of “agape love” which actually isn’t love at all. Jesus knew that one day Peter would mature into agape love.

Jesus accepts us as we are today. No need to make false pretenses. No sense in doing that---Jesus sees through it all. He accepts us as we are and loves us into mature humble, faithful, loving disciples in the days to come. His invitation to join him, to continue along this path is always available to us.

We can meet Jesus on the beach, in the garden, on a mountain top, in the church or your favorite chair at home. He wants to be in a loving relationship with us. When we repent, we meet him as compassionate, forgiving, generous Christ who offers us healing and salvation, not wrath or condemnation.

We are all undergoing transformation. We can be transformed into the person God created us to be with Christ-like qualities or we can become deceiving, selfish destructive people. Which form of transformation we end up experiencing has to do who we are in relationship with. If you are in a relationship with Christ, then you will experience what Peter and the other disciples experienced from him that morning on the beach.

However, if you reject Christ’s loving relationship, then the day will come when you will experience God’s wrath and condemnation.

It’s your choice. You have the freedom to choose. May you choose well!

It’s my prayer that this message inspires, sustains and nurtures your faith in our holy, loving, just God. Amen.