

The subject: Transformation

It is amazing to me how God keeps developing us! Just last summer we set a goal for ourselves to begin in October that read like this:

Make this ministry year the year of evangelism, in which we discover, develop and use our mission gifts as a people so that at the end of the year we can look back and see that over a dozen people have come to faith in Jesus through our ministry.

I've got a feeling that we will more than accomplish that goal.

But I think God may have an even deeper goal that he wanted us to discover. Since October, even, we have been deepened.

What we are really into as far as our mission of evangelism goes, is not just getting people to cross over "from darkness to light." There is an ongoing journey all about *becoming light*. All sorts of Americans say they are Christians. People believe in Jesus. As far as the statistics go, you'd have to say that most people must be converted. But everyone knows better. A better question for the pollsters to ask than, "Do you believe in Jesus?" might be "Does Jesus believe in you? Does he believe you are his follower?"

There is more to faith in Christ than praying a prayer of repentance and surrender (although most people start there, so let's get them started!). That's why our catch-word, more than having a year of "evangelism," has become TRANSFORMATION.

We devote this issue to getting you to think and talk about that. **How does God transform people and the world, and how to we participate?**

The Great Recovery

I've been pooping and puking, had that old flu-bug thing. There are many beautiful things about living in community. One is that you have people to take care of you when you get sick. There are also downsides. One is that there are more people to get you sick. When one person gets sick, it makes its way through the whole family. So it is, as I laid around thinking about this transformation dialogue, I could not think much beyond the bathroom. Surprisingly, I met God there, or at least gathered some thoughts on sickness and recovery.

Rich Mullins (a crazy-poet-ragamuffin- barefoot-wandering-psalter-troubador-man, dead now) used to say that the Kingdom of God spreads just like disease. He used to say that transformation does not come through efficient organizational structures or deep intellectual discussions..., but that like diseases, transformation happens through breath, through touch, through life. As this disease spread through our community, I thought of the transformation spreading on the streets.

On the streets, on our street, the transformation looks a lot like recovery. Addiction is one of the most wicked, brutal beasts. It stands ruthlessly in the way of God's Kingdom. The world is being strangled by addiction -- television, heroin, internet, cigarettes, consumerism, pornography. It is often hard to see where recovery triumphs. We spend a lot of time with a radical recovery (drug and alcohol) community called New Jerusalem (singing, marching, studying, grubbing). From friends with addictions, we learn about our addiction, and our recovery. We are all rotten addicts, suffering from the sickness of our flesh. And we are all beautiful saints, created in the perfect image of Love. Recovery, like conversion, is an individual decision. We cannot spread some sweeping vision of the Kingdom of God... until we realize the Kingdom is within us (and others). We cannot help the world recover until we ourselves begin to recover.

And yet, recovery, like conversion, is more than an individual decision. Our friends at New

Jerusalem also have a sign on their wall that reads: 'We cannot fully recover unless we help the world that made us sick recover.' They recognize that their recovery is deeply intertwined with the recovery of their community, and that their community's recovery is deeply bound up in the Great Recovery of Creation.

Our recovery, our transformation must go beyond ourselves and into the groaning of Creation. We have much to recover, for much has been lost. Some Institutions may need to be transformed. Others may need to be abandoned (unlike people, they do not have souls). And yet with other institutions, we must wage a war of love, for they destroy life. Institutions are merely humanity's attempt to make itself permanent. And because humans are both beautiful and rotten, institutions become a preservation of that rottenness and that beauty. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God cannot remain personal.

So this is the tension of transformation, the personal and the corporate Body. Our bodies, the temples, are where that transformation begins. Christ's Body, the Church, is where that transformation is fulfilled. Lives must be transformed and converted. So must entire peoples. God saved me. God also saved Israel. And God is saving the Tribe of Circle. We are to be the visible expression of the Kingdom of God, of another way of life, a new humanity - - amidst a world dying in addiction, drowning in the stuff of earth, still in the clutch of the empire. But this is pure religion -- to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world.

People often ask whether we are "evangelical." I used to dodge that one; now I embrace it. If by evangelical you mean, do we believe in spreading the good news of God's Kingdom, of Creation's liberation and recovery -- Absolutely! This is the transformation. Let's spread the recovery faster than the disease. We are evangelicals. And yet we believe the Kingdom is just as likely to spread through breath as it is to spread through words.

Shane Claiborne

Therapy and Spiritual Growth

"If you hold my teachings you are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This is the bold claim of Jesus in John 8. So why is that so many Christians seem to be restricted in their living? Is it possible that they do not have the truth in some way? My answer to that question is a loud yes! Many parts of the Bible confirm that as well. In Romans 7 for example, Paul writes about doing things he doesn't want to do and not doing things he does want to do. He feels lost in the conflict within himself about what he wants. He describes a dynamic that in psychological language could be translated as a classic conflict between the conscious (that which we can identify as our own thoughts, feelings, behaviors and self perception - what we might call our "self") and the unconscious (parts of our persons that are in some way still our "self" but remain outside our awareness). This split we all experience in ourselves between what is conscious and what is unconscious means that we don't yet know the full truth about ourselves. I would argue that this is another result of sin. In very simple terms, orthodox Christian theology goes something like this: Sin entered the world and humans participated with sin and so became separated from God. The result of this separation is profound brokenness in our relating to one another. I'm saying that sin also cut into the heart of us to separate us from ourselves, to fragment our experience of ourselves so we are now beings who know parts of ourselves in conscious experience and who do not know parts of ourselves, the unconscious. This creates a situation in which we are not free to act and think as we wish, but are at times surprised at what we do. In order to move toward freedom we need to know the truth about ourselves, that is we need to know what is going on unconsciously within us to motivate our choices. This is what I believe good therapy is all about. Therapy is about making what is unconscious in us conscious. If we are to be free, we must know the truth about ourselves and this in turn will help us to see more clearly the great good that is offered to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible is filled with material like this that demonstrates profound psychological insights although the language of psychology may not be employed on its pages.

So therapy that helps to bring about transformation will offer insights into our unconscious motivations. It will help us to see denied parts of our self. We will encounter a clearer picture of

our hurts, our longings and our methods of attaining what we want and think we need in order to survive and thrive in our world. But what the field of psychology has discovered and what Jesus knew all along was that insight was not enough. We need more than information about ourselves. We also need experience of new ways of relating and being in the world. We might gain ability to see how we continue to repeat patterns of thought, feeling and behavior in our lives and how our strategies to survive don't work very well, but that alone won't change us. We also need to experience something different. In therapy the hope is to create a relationship between therapist and client in which the client is able find a sufficiently safe relational environment to risk new choices. Therapy will eventually offer a client the opportunity to more fully experience the reality of his or her own inner world (knowing the truth) and to experience new ways of relating, to live into new ways of being (set free). That is change.

Why can't this happen outside of therapy? It can and does. What therapy offers in the process of transformation is a protected and safe place for the process to go on. In our social relating there are complex interacts between us and it is very difficult much of the time to sort out what is us and what is them, what is primarily internal and what is external. In therapy the highly structured nature of the encounters all set within the framework of office and appointment, allows the therapist to relate in clearly defined ways that keep the focus on the interior drama of the client and offer access to deeper and deeper material within the client. New experiences and even experiments in relating in ways that are divergent for the client become possible and growth results. Therapy creates a container for all the pain and confusion so that it can be sorted without judgment. Within the therapeutic relationship the client is offered space to become aware of things that once were too dangerous to be aware of - rage, fear, vulnerability, abuse, passion, calling, etc. - and these are explored without shame, abandonment, retaliation or punishment.

As I struggled with how to give words to how therapy works for this article, I spoke with Kim Dalton, a good friend and fellow-therapist to get some help. Kim offered the phrase that good therapy transforms in that it becomes "a microcosm of the holy." Because of the work of Jesus on the cross, all the shame humans fear and all the punishment humans could deserve have been taken care of. There is now no condemnation. Most of us don't seem to experience that in our relating generally, but in therapy we can find the space to encounter ourselves in this marvelous environment of grace that holds us together so we can finally know how we have fallen apart. Good therapy is love made manifest and that is how God uses it to transform us. By the limitless nature of God's grace, love breaks through to us in many ways in our lives so therapy isn't the only avenue by which God will transform you. But for those who choose to work within therapy to allow God to show them the full spectrum of their inner world, there is great potential for transformation. Jesus was right. The truth does set us free because He has brought love to bear even to the farthest reaches of our interior world.

Gwen White

Detransformation

One of the secrets churches keep is that a lot of people are leaving them all the time. As terrible as image as this is, it is still true — not everyone makes it from the shipwreck to the life raft. Not everyone even believes that drowning is drowning! Let's be frank, since we last spoke like this, a lot of people joined with Circle of Hope and a lot of people disappeared.

A few examples of coming, connecting, transforming:

- Two of our cells are mostly all unbelievers but the leaders. They haven't even made it to a public meeting yet, most of them. They are searching.
- Several people who are recovering addicts discovered us and kept recovering. They are changing.
- Several people who had been away, "avoiding God," returned. They are reconnecting.
- Lot's of people (over a hundred) heard about us and "came looking" during our public meeting.
- God repeatedly met with people and reportedly caused wonderful things to happen. That's transformation.

BUT, here are a few examples of leaving, disconnecting, essentially "detransforming":

- A couple of people traded in Jesus to pursue their sexual fantasies. They are connecting elsewhere.
- A couple of people left in a huff because they didn't think our leaders were pure enough, morally.
- A person wouldn't come to worship because they became unsure that Jesus and God are one. They are disconnecting, maybe.
- Several people followed their jobs to another town. They are leaving.
- A person had a fight with the friend who brought them and disappeared.
- Maybe more people than we know had an experience with God or his people that freaked them out in some way and they put their spiritual search on the back burner. That's detransformation.

Maybe I seem to be too spatial, too interested in seeing people's faith in terms of whether they are connected to our church and its meetings or not. I don't know. I'm not sure how else to talk about this secret unless we talk about what people really do. When we all meet Jesus, I don't think the discussion will be about *"What did you believe in the privacy of your own thoughts?"* I think it will be more about *"How faithful were you with the body, time and spiritual gifts I gave you?"*

In our society, not long ago, we managed to relegate all sorts of meaningful things to "personal space." Faith is one of them (sex, abortion, opinions, interpretations, bank accounts are other examples of things that just aren't anyone else's business). In the church, we do the same thing. Jesus says "Let your light shine," but we allow for a lot of ambivalent shadiness. We do this, especially, as Circle of Hope, because we care about hundreds of scared people loitering in various shadows. They are scared in their relationships, hiding out from their bosses, silent in the face of injustice, unsure that is it even acceptable to think one thing is true and another false. We know a lot of people who are like flies on the window sill ready to take off at the least sign of threat. We allow for a lot of ambivalence or we wouldn't have many relationships at all. We avoid sudden moves that might startle skittish loved ones.

I am totally into seeing people as "on a journey that is theirs to take." But I am puzzled, quite often, as to how to respond to the ones who never get anywhere! Or, even harder, how to relate to friends who quite visibly "detransform" before my eyes, if they stay around long enough for me to see it.

How does "detransformation" take place? When you figure it out, please tell me. So far, I can only go with what I am observing. Let me list a few things I have seen as likely reasons a person will end up going away from God (and I mean going away from taking the revelation of Jesus seriously) instead of going toward a deeper relationship with him, not continuing to participate as God transforms them, but running the other direction:

- They live in fear. They are so locked into their tiny selves that they can't get out, they just keep digging the bunker deeper.
- They can't get over the toxic church system (or other system) that soured them on community. If you can't love, it is tough to hang with Jesus.
- They are so enmeshed with another person (mate, lover, friendship circle, parent) that they can't have an independent relationship with God.
- They have sold their soul to capitalism and so follow money around (see point #1). Or, less crass, they follow their career around looking for fullness in it. Either way, they never stay in one place long enough, or have enough time, to build enough security or mutuality to dare transformation.
- Desire rules them. I don't mean ambition or vision; I mean sex or power or an unconscious defense system that goes unchallenged. Without God or faith, all that is left is desire.
- They don't think they can think what someone else thinks. Somehow getting wisdom has gone out of fashion. Nowadays, if you don't think you've created your belief system yourself, you must be a chump.

Why bother pointing this out? (It might be considered negative, and we aren't supposed to be negative!) What makes me want to talk about it is these things A LOT is that A LOT of us get discouraged when people detransform right before our eyes. It is hard to tell some new acquaintance about the truth in Jesus when one of your dear friends is doubting it in your living room. It is hard to extol the blessings of your church when someone has just made a big stink about the terrible thing that happened to them in it. It is hard to tell the story of the transformation God has done in you when skeptical people keep looking at you and wondering if you are all you

are cracked up to be. The world is just a HELL of a lot better at detransforming. If you doubt that, just look at the Philly suburbs – farmland to subdivision. Or look at some Philly neighborhoods – community to rubble. Or just look at a few of my friends – comrades to critics, evangelists to agnostics, loving couples to divorcees, prophets to adulterers. I hope admitting the struggle out loud helps make it less unbearable.

I was going to put in big chunks of 2 Timothy 2 at this point, but I think I'll just direct you there. The point I want to end with (that I think will encourage you) is this — in the earliest churches, they had the same kind of experiences we have — people are people. By the time Paul was writing letters to Timothy in his old age (we think) there were a lot of people who had detransformed before the eyes of their friends. It was just as painful then as it is now.

Here are two sets of conclusions he came to that we can hang onto:

- The possibility of NOT enduring, of DISowning, of NOT remaining faithful, are the risks we take when we follow Jesus. **But don't be afraid. God is faithful.** (2 Tim. 2:11-13)
- Being approved, not being ashamed, handling truth, standing on a firm foundation, and being sealed as “one of God's people” are all parts of our birthright in Jesus. **A person can learn to live out of that grace. And God does not give up hope.** (2 Tim. 2:14-19)

We need to keep reminding one another of these things when people are struggling. We're young; we struggle to get some confidence about who we are. That's OK. Let's help one another when the quarreling is threatening to ruin people, when the godless chatter is deafening, and when people advance crackpot ideas that worm their way into the hearts of the weak.

Detransformation happens. It hurts to watch it. There is no way we can love others, as we have been given to do, and not be impacted by it. But the Lord knows those who are his. We can trust him.

Rod White

Getting Over the Hump

About 12 years ago I remember a friend asking me very directly what particular sin I was “working on.” I had no idea what they were talking about. In theory I knew I wasn't perfect, I knew I could do better and be nicer to people, I knew I was proud sometimes. But at least I was trying to be more Christ-like, and probably the Holy Spirit was magically changing me somehow. Wasn't that enough? Did I have to be able to articulate it? Plus, I thought, I had a pretty good thing going. People liked me. Why go changing and doing all this painful, hard stuff when it's working like it is?

So you can imagine what a terrible time in my life it was when I finally realized that this spiritual journey I am on is a path of transformation. I fought it off as long as I could. I'd like to say I was a teenager when it all hit, but actually I was 26 years old, in my second year at seminary, and in a very bad, very long relationship with someone with whom I saw everything eye-to-eye theologically, but didn't even like, let alone love. I became depressed and very anxious about being in a relationship that on paper seemed perfect, but in reality was deadening. The problem wasn't the relationship, though; it just happened to be what pushed me to the edge.

The revelation that I was in need of some transformation began with the observation that, much to my surprise, I behaved quite neurotically at times! I had always thought I was a good people-person, but now I began to notice that I would do some pretty irrational, obsessive things to connect with people. For the first time I saw that I craved intimate connection with people -- I mean, really, really craved it. My mood would alter drastically if I didn't get what I wanted from someone. I would drop friends fairly quickly and without much thought or sadness if they became too difficult -- i.e., if it was too much work for me to obtain my “emotional orgasm” from them. The list goes on.

This is also when I began to understand that sin is not just behavioral (as in doing bad things, not being good enough, etc.). It is, more significantly, worshipping and craving things instead of God, things that ultimately lead to bondage. Looking at the way I behaved I realized that emotional connection with people rated far above anything having to do with God.

So here I was in a disastrous relationship: I consciously lived in the rational world where the relationship made perfect sense; I was determined to make it work. Subconsciously I was driven by these out-of-control desires for emotional highs which would never be possible with this person, or any person for that matter. No wonder I felt desperate and dead inside.

It also became clear to me that almost all of my interactions with people were ultimately about ME! Fortunately, I had learned socially acceptable ways to get people to like me -- ask lots of questions, good eye contact, lots of empathy, listen, etc. These were also skills that translated well into "ministry," perfect for being in seminary. But I did these things not because I primarily cared about people, but instead because it got me friends and intimate connection. So it was an awful moment in my life when I clearly saw the real motivation in my relationships and "career", and knew that I couldn't change it. I try to suck the life out of people because I feel dead and scared. I use people.

In many ways the beginning of the transformation within me was as mysterious as my initial insight into my behavior. All I know is that I wanted more than anything to be different, to be free. I saw that my urges would never be satiated, that I was choosing death, and I wanted more than anything to choose life. I began journaling vignettes about my neurotic behavior. I told all of my closest friends about my new insight and asked their honest observations about how I relate to people. I was quiet before God. I was willing to risk the pain of the process and the unknown of what I would become. And that's where God met me.

So now today I can actually say that in a very fundamental way I am a different person than I was before! The transformation took place over a period of time and I still have a ways to go in this area. And believe me, this is only one of many areas in my life that is in need of God's transforming power. But I know without a doubt that I could never go back to being the same as I was before this experience.

The amazing revelation is that I understood for the first time, in more than just theory, that this was what life's journey is all about -- continually choosing life over death. As simple and rational as that sounds, my natural inclination is so often to crave bondage! I had to get over this initial hump and experience the incredible freedom before I could wholeheartedly say yes to this mysterious, transforming journey with Christ.

In retrospect, I don't know what I was thinking about the Bible verses that speak of us continually being transformed into the likeness of Christ. At some level that sounds quite boring! But the more I learn about how totally radical Christ was, I do want to be like him: free from my controlling desire to connect with people so that I can freely love and freely be loved by others; free from my subconscious agenda in order to speak wise, healing words from God; free from my obsessive thoughts to be able to chill out and meditate and pray for hours; free from my internalized violence in order to fight the injustices of this world. Jesus was cool! Jesus was free! Jesus was radical!

Second, I think I was afraid, and often still am. If I accept this journey of transformation, who am I going to be in five years? It's so gray and unknown. At times I love my bondage, I love my neurosis, because I know it. Jesus was radical and unpredictable and, bottom line, that is scary! But I can say from experience that allowing God to change you in areas where you are dead inside—which, by the way, often feels like jumping off a cliff—is the only way to find life.

So even though now I still don't see so clearly, and even though I am still filled with fears, I am happy to say that in a year from now, in some fundamental ways, I will not be the same person I am today! I believe God will continue to transform me.

Pam Rowen

All I Ever Needed to Know About Evangelism I Learned in Kindergarten...

Over the past few years I have grown to despise the word evangelism. It causes heart palpitations and creates an almost uncontrollable urge to run and hide. The minute someone wants to talk

about evangelism I want to scream, “No- you can’t make me!!”

I’ll never forget the moment I began to hate it. I was 13 years old and I had been trained as a “counselor” for a major evangelistic event called “Celebrate Jesus” or something like that. It was one of those outdoor concerts in a stadium — an all-weekend kind of thing. I loved Jesus; I wanted to see people meet him. But I was absolutely terrified at having to talk to someone I didn’t know. I felt compelled to be there, however, because it was what God called every Christian to be about and (of course!) a major event such as that was the very best way to reach people. Bigger is always better (or at least more impressive.)

The ensuing events are among some of my most painful memories. After the call to come forward, I remember looking around frantically for someone I could pray with. Inside of me were two huge conflicting emotions, both wanting to do that and dreading it. Finally, in desperation, (because I can make myself do a lot of things I don’t want to do) I went up to a guy. He was easily twice my age. He was wearing an AC/DC t-shirt (which I remember freaked me out a little bit when I saw it) had long hair, and a scraggly moustache. He was wearing black eye-liner. I had nothing in common with this man, didn’t want to be there, and had absolutely no love for him. To date I have no recollection of what I said. I certainly have no recollection of what he said. It was awkward and horrible and for years I have felt personally responsible for his salvation (or lack of it).

The fifteen or so years following this event were spent trying just about every method I could find to tell people about Jesus. I spent years on teams in college and was a missionary for four years. I did evangelistic book tables, door to door evangelism, street evangelism, evangelistic talks, evangelistic Bible studies, and more evangelistic concerts. In that whole time I led one person to Jesus that I know of. It’s the “that I know of” part that kept me going. I hoped somehow that my faithfulness would pay off and that somehow God would pull good out of the ashes of my efforts.

When I was little I did not hate evangelism. I didn’t know it was a thing you could do right or wrong. I didn’t know people had to force themselves to do it, and that it took such huge amounts of effort and money. People left me alone at that point and didn’t try to tell me how to do evangelize. I remember late night sleepovers talking with my friend Tonya about heaven and her fear of death. I remember taking my friend Paula to church with me every week. I remember telling my story over and over about how God had healed my legs when I was six. I just talked about Jesus and hung with my friends. It was really very easy and natural and I didn’t know it was called anything. It was later that I was taught how to do “evangelism.”

I don’t mean this to be an, “I used to be ignorant, and now I have the answers” sort of article, because I’m still struggling with obeying God’s call to make disciples. What I do want to share are some of the insights I’ve recently had, in the hopes that they may indeed spark dialogue.

1) The church has tended to focus on large scale evangelistic events because it is out of touch with the surrounding culture. The attempt is made to somehow become relevant and invite people to them rather than going where people are. It is also much easier to talk at people than to listen and build actual relationships. I have as many stories about them being useful, but as a sole means for communication, they are not enough.

2) Methods are easier than relationships. Jesus walked and talked with people. He ate with them, and called them to follow him, just as they were. Jesus in us calls us to the same.

3) Jesus is responsible and quite capable of revealing himself to people. We act in partnership with him. When we ask him to be a part of our relationships, our work, our friends, I believe he hears and is present.

My experiment right now is to remain agenda-less with my friends. I am stubbornly waiting for God to be alive in our relationships. I don’t want to try to convince anyone of anything again or try to “do” evangelism to them. I am determined to pray and fight for the lives of my friends and live my life honestly before them -- but I will not befriend them in order to be able to convert them. I will love because God loves them and makes me able. I will love with the love of God -- sometimes well, sometimes poorly, but I will love and learn what it means to love. I believe that

God knows much better than I how to communicate himself to people- and I will try to listen and speak when I am called to do so, and be silent when I have nothing to say.

In our cell group Rebecca Miller and I are very determined to allow Jesus to reveal himself. We read the stories of Jesus' life and talk about what he is like with people that are interested. There is no agenda beyond that. People are not banging down the door to get in at this point, but it is cool to be able to have the space to invite people if they want to know more about Jesus. I have friends who are not into the idea at all, and some that are. It's all good. At some level I worry about not being involved enough in their process, but I ask God to be, and I figure that has to be enough.

I have never felt so free in my entire life. That is true. The desire of my heart is still to love God and see people reconciled to him. But I have to trust that he can do the real work. This life in the spirit requires a greater amount of listening I feel, which in a lot of ways is much harder for me than just forcing myself to spew John 3:16 at people. And if I don't look to Jesus, I have no inspiration and no desire for anyone but myself. My new process is much more exciting though. I feel more hopeful for my friends than ever before because their eternity does not rest on my shoulders alone. It is indeed a partnership. And I partner with you all in this as well. Let's continue to struggle to find the way of the spirit of God.

"If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit" *Galatians 5:25*

"Now the Lord is that spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." *2 Corinthians 3:17*

Annette Jeffrey