

Waterford Mennonite Church
 January 27, 2013
 Worship That Transforms Us
 Scripture Texts: Matthew 5:13-16, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Purpose: To inspire the congregation to digest the awesome reality that through Christ we are transformed which leads to moving beyond our walls as we live out the calling to join in Christ's mission of reconciliation.

Today is the third Sunday in our series of looking at who, what, and why we worship. We started the series with Pastor Neil introducing this topic and naming the foundational claim that worship is fundamentally about God and offering our praise to God. Last week Pastor Velma prompted us to consider how we worship in the everyday as she invited us to show up, stop the flow of words as we reflect, and to practice the presence of God. This morning we move to the topic of worship that transforms us. We are invited to sit with this notion that our worship of God somehow transforms us. This transformation leads to us becoming a visible witness and presence in the world as we join in God's work of reconciliation.

"True worship will inevitably spill out into the world in the visible form of transformed lives: worship is inherently missional."

John D. Roth, *Practices: Mennonite Worship and Witness*, 23.

In preparation for this sermon I read an engaging and thought-provoking book by Goshen College Professor John D. Roth entitled *Practices: Mennonite Worship and Witness*. Perhaps others of you have also read this book. Throughout this book Roth argues that "True worship will inevitably spill out into the world in the visible form of transformed lives: worship is inherently missional."

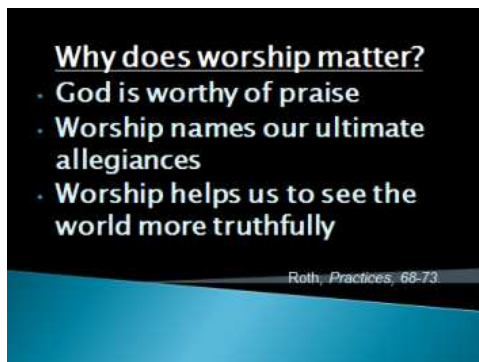
As we delve into this theme I invite you to turn to 2 Corinthians 5:11. Verses 11 through 15 set the stage for verses 16 through 21. However, before we get to verse 11, it is helpful to be reminded that throughout this letter Paul is working to renew a healthy relationship with the church in Corinth.

After Paul speaks of his current situation, we come to verse 14 and read Paul's words: "Christ's love compels or urges us." Everywhere we turn, we are bombarded with a variety of people, advertisements, companies, ideologies, and beliefs—all hoping to compel or urge us into action to help meet their needs or their agenda. And yet, Paul states that it is the love of Jesus that "compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." Already in this verse we are beginning to get a glimpse of how worshiping God transforms us. Through our worshiping we experience a change of what we will or will not allow to compel or urge us to action.

Another significant part of this verse, which is again imperative to the understandings of how worship transforms us, is this statement that Jesus died for *all*. Many theologians have tried to tackle atonement theories, spending hours and hours pondering and writing about what this statement and others like it mean. What is significant to highlight this morning is that Paul was clear in his understanding that Christ died for *all*. This statement reminds us of the inclusiveness of Jesus' love. Jesus' love is not just for those who are educated, wear the right clothes, speak the

right language, make the right moral decisions, who appear worthy to receive Jesus' love, or want or appreciate Jesus' love. Instead, Jesus died for *all*. However, not only did Jesus die, but verse 15 proclaims that Jesus died *and* was raised again. **The love of Jesus is powerful, one that moves us to action, propels and compels us into God's mission for this world, the world to which God sent God's only Son.** It is the basis of God's love manifested through Jesus that we embrace, proclaim, and encounter in worship which leads to the transformation described in verses sixteen and seventeen.

Before we get to the next verses, I think it would be helpful to pause and look at the broader question of why and how does worship matter in this process of transformation? John D. Roth addresses this question in his book by listing four points of why worship does matter.



First, Roth says that God is worthy of praise. Neil spoke about this point two weeks ago. Worship is the appropriate response to an amazing God, the one who extends love to us as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Secondly, Roth says that worship names our ultimate allegiances. Roth writes, “As we gather to sing, read scripture, confess, pray, preach, and share, **we collectively express our most fundamental convictions about life’s meaning and purpose. At its heart, worship is a public proclamation about sovereignty**

and allegiance” (Roth, p. 69). By choosing to get out of bed this morning and choosing to come to church, we together by the simple action of joining for worship are making a public proclamation of our priorities and of who or what is Lord in our lives.

This point also leads to Roth’s next point that worship helps us see the world truthfully. This directly correlates to 2 Corinthians 5:16, which states, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” As we join in worship, we praise God, name our ultimate allegiances, and experience a transformation of our vision and perspective of ourselves and of others. Seeing the world truthfully means that through worshipping God we will be able to see ourselves truthfully as God sees us, not as we see ourselves, nor as we fear others see us. We will also be able to look at the world around us, all creation and all humanity, with new eyes to encompass it all no longer from a worldly point of view, but from a view that has been transformed by the love of Jesus. If our eyes are transformed to see everyone around us as children of God, as ones that Jesus died for. Wouldn’t that, shouldn’t that, automatically transform how we treat others?

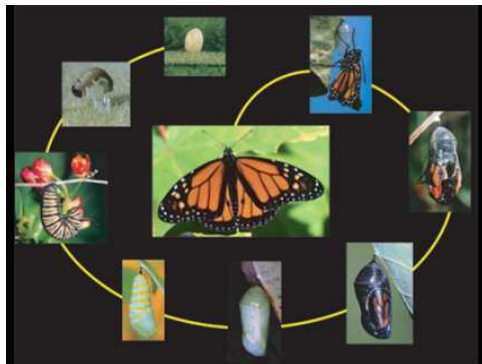
John D. Roth’s final point of why worship matters is that worship is the gathering of the new community: the body of Christ. Roth offers that “Worship, (then), marks the identity of a people who have been called out by God, **a people whose life together makes the presence of Christ visible in the world**” (Roth, p. 76). Therefore his overall conclusion is worship is the gathered form of witness.

Now you might be thinking, “Wow, Cindy, thank you for that neat little list. Now everything about this transformation and our calling into mission is crystal clear!” However, we do need to name that there is still a high level of mystery involved in this transformation. Paul must have realized that there was a level of mystery because he continues in verse 17 to stress the point

even stronger: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone the new is here!” As V. George Shillington eloquently points out in the Believers Church Bible Commentary, “Paul envisions ‘a total replacement of the old by the new, not just a rehabilitation of the old.’ ... **The new creation emerges out of the old, thus rendering the old inoperative in the presence of the new.** The process is redemptive, not destructive, for the new creation does not destroy the old, but recreates it” (V. George Shillington, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, 131).

This week I sat with this text, and I sat with this text, and I tried to figure out how to express this new creation, this mystery which we are invited and called into as followers of Jesus, as ones who gather for corporate worship on Sundays and then go and live our everyday lives the other six days—as ones called to experience and embrace this transformation into a new creation. Well, it was during a normal daily routine when I saw God in a new way through the simple act of reading Elijah a bedtime story. One of Elijah’s favorite bedtime books is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. This short beautifully portrayed book tells the story of a small egg that was on a leaf. A caterpillar came out of that egg and was very hungry. He proceeded to eat through a variety of things including different types of fruit, chocolate cake, salami, ice cream, and then through a nice green leaf. Then the now big caterpillar builds a cocoon around itself and then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon, pushed his way out and ... and this is where Elijah and I hold our breath as I turn the page and proclaim with great excitement, “He was a beautiful butterfly!” And Elijah claps and cheers and says it was metamorphosis! And then inevitably his face will fall and he will mournfully say, “But mama, how does he become a caterpillar again?” And I say, “Oh, Elijah, he has changed forever into this beautiful butterfly! See his beautiful colors, and now he can fly! He will never change back into a caterpillar.” And then Elijah will pause for a moment and then cheer once again and say “Yes, a beautiful butterfly!!”

Now I did not want to base all my knowledge of the butterfly lifecycle on a children’s book, so I did look this week at the website for The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University. I must admit that like Elijah I too enjoy reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and even though I have read it hundreds of times I too am always amazed when we turn the page from the brown cocoon and find a stunningly beautiful butterfly! This picture shows you the complete life cycle of the butterfly. From the tiny egg to the tiny caterpillar that will emerge from it. The caterpillar’s job is to eat and eat, as this food will be stored and used later in life when it is a butterfly.



Then when the caterpillar is fully grown it becomes a chrysalis. This stage can last a few weeks, a month, or even longer. From the outside it might appear that not much is happening, but inside the chrysalis, **irreversible and amazing transformations are taking place.** And then at last the new creation will emerge from the chrysalis, the caterpillar now transformed into a butterfly. The short stubby legs are replaced with long legs and large colorful wings. A creature that was bound to a small area is now released to fly. The old creation is rendered inoperative in the presence of the new.

Our calling as followers of Jesus Christ, as ones transformed through worshipping God, is to live our lives as butterflies. It is not enough to simply allow God to transform our vision. Instead we

have to enter the cocoon and allow the Spirit to transform us so that we are entirely a new creation. **The butterfly experiences and interacts with the world around itself in a completely different way from the way it did as a caterpillar. The opposite is also true. The world around the butterfly experiences this new creation in a completely different way from the way it did the caterpillar.** The old creation is rendered inoperative in the presence of the new.

Paul continues in this passage to say one way to live as a new creation is to serve as God's ambassadors as we actively and enthusiastically join in God's ministry of reconciliation. Perhaps, though, you are still scratching your head, wondering what this means. And so we return to Matthew 5, which is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here is a place where Jesus gives his followers, including us, the corporate calling for his faith community. It is not about the structures of the church, or even what new program they should create. Instead Jesus gives us the simple calling to be salt and light in the world.

We must name and acknowledge that salt was the most commonly used seasoning in antiquity. Its preservative powers made it an absolute necessity of life and a virtual synonym for life-giving forces. One biblical scholar writes that "Salt was and is used in a number of ways—as a seasoning, as a preservative, or as a purifying agent" (Richard B. Gardner, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Matthew*, 99). In biblical times they would have put salt into the ground as a fertilizer. In the age before refrigeration, salt was imperative for preserving food. Also, as people who lived in a hot climate, salt in their diet was essential to replace that which was lost by the body as it cooled through perspiring. In fact, salt was such an important compound in biblical times that it became a medium of exchange. We, as followers of Jesus are to be salty. Perhaps that no longer strikes us as odd, so maybe we should insert a different spice! We are to be the red hot pepper of this world! We are to be the curry powder of this world! The message is clear though—we are to bring out the God-flavors of this world. We return to the quote from John D. Roth: **"True worship will inevitably spill out into the world in the visible form of transformed lives: worship is inherently missional."** And as Eugene Peterson translates in *The Message*, in the same way we are to be light, not for our own purpose, but to bring out the God colors of this world.

Will we embrace the cocoon, embrace the transformation inherent in the act of worship, and embrace and energetically and enthusiastically live our lives as butterflies as a new creation? Perhaps you are like me and sometimes need something visible to remind you of your calling. Ruthie will play our song of response, "Will you come and follow me" In this hymn Jesus asks us, "Will you come and follow me and never be the same?" As Ruthie plays, you are invited to come forward, including children, to select a small butterfly to take home with you. Perhaps you could place it somewhere in your house, or your car, or on your locker, or at work. It is my hope and prayer that the butterflies will serve as a visible reminder to us all that we have been transformed through worshiping God and therefore are called to be salt and light in the world as we join in God's ministry of reconciliation.