

Sunday January 26, 2025
Third Sunday after Epiphany

Meditation: “Change vs. Transformation”

This is the eighth time I’ve cycled through this set of readings. Over the years I’ve focused on different lessons and on different parts of the lessons. Sometimes I focus on the gospel. Other times I focus on the old testament lesson. Sometimes I focus on the epistle. It can be difficult to find something new to focus on. This year, I’m back to the gospel lesson. The thing that really struck me was that Jesus takes the words of the prophet Isaiah and applies them to himself. He is saying to all who have ears to hear that he has come to transform the world of his day.

So, I want to try something. Everyone who is able, please stand up. Now, I want you to trade places with someone beside you, or behind you, or even across the centre aisle from you, and then sit down. Okay? Go!

What you just experienced is change. That wasn’t so bad, was it? I mean, the roof didn’t collapse, nobody died, and the earth is still revolving around the sun, right? So why is it that we don’t like change? Why is it we are afraid of change? Why is it we resist change with every fibre of our being?

And yet, change happens, doesn’t it? Change happens all the time.

A few weeks ago, I took an online course and they talked a lot about change and transition. What’s the difference? I’m glad you asked. Change happens to us. It is beyond our control, like when I announced that I was planning to retire in the first quarter of 2026, that will bring change to all of you, and it is entirely beyond your control that change will happen. What you are in control of is what that change will look like for you. Transition, on the other hand, is about the emotional work that you have to do to embrace change. The first thing that is to be embraced is the loss of something. For something new to

happen, something old must end. When you buy a new vehicle, you usually sell or trade in the old one. If you have an emotional attachment to the old car, there is emotional work involved in saying goodbye to that old car. And that is something that must happen before you can embrace the new car.

Right about now you are thinking that I have lost it, because I am talking about transition and I started by saying that Jesus came to transform, and the two are not the same thing. Or are they? That is what I have been wrestling with all week. What is the difference between transition and transformation? Anyone care to offer an opinion?

Do you remember what the quote from Isaiah was? Listen again.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

I don’t know how many times I read this before it dawned on me. The emotional work of transition is work that involves me. How do I feel about letting go? How do I feel about embracing something new and different? How will I be when the new comes about? Will I be able to cope with the change? Transformation, on the other hand, while being inner work (How can I see with new eyes? How can I notice that which I have never noticed, or at least never paid attention to before? How can I see with God’s eyes?), transformation is not focused on me and how I cope with the world, but is focused on the other. “To bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,” are all about someone else, not me.

The transformation that Jesus brings is one of changing our view of the world from one of being self-centred, to one of being other-centred. Specifically, the 'other' that Jesus would have us focus on is the dispossessed. It's no wonder the authorities are upset with him. He is asking them to stop focusing on their own position, their own power, their own privilege, their own wealth, their own comfort, and focus instead on the poor and marginalized, the outcast and the dispossessed.

So far, every time I read about Jesus talking about the good news it is always about the good news of the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God is not about us as individuals. The kingdom of God is about us as living beings. The kingdom of God isn't fully realized not until we are in it, but until everybody is in it. And yes, that includes even the people we don't agree with, the people we don't like, and the people who we consider to be enemies. Grasping this is the beginning of our own personal transformation into the people God created us to be. May it be so.