

“A Transformation of the Spirit” Ps 29; Acts 8:14-17; Lk. 3:15-17, 21-22
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Is God a God of judgment or grace? That lies underneath today’s Gospel, and behind this title, “A Transformation of the Spirit”.

To hear John the Baptist tell it, God is a God of judgment: winnowing fork; fire. Calvin and Hobbes: do you believe in God? Well, **SOMEBODY** has it in for me! St. Peter at the gate of heaven to the preacher about the taxi driver: “While you preached, people slept. While he drove, people prayed.”

To hear Jesus tell it, God is a God of grace – You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well – pleased.

So, do we believe people can change? Do we believe we can change? Someone will say, “Fine for Jesus, but not us.”

Ah, then we reveal our hand, don’t we? For if we believe only Jesus can receive God’s commendation, we have missed the point of faith.

Faith says, “If you do not like the life you have, you may have another.” John’s baptism, while it may have served a purpose, did little to motivate beyond fear of punishment. Jesus’ baptism lifts us to the best in ourselves.

So this ‘transformation of the Spirit’ is both a change in how we understand God AND ourselves. God desires to call us “beloved”. It is also about starting a process of growth in faith, growth in grace, by which we live more and more as God desires. “You make me want to be a better person.” That’s Jesus, that’s the Holy Spirit, thank God.

Okay, church Jeopardy: And the answer is “Sanctification.” What is ‘Growing more godly day by day by seeking God first in our lives?’ That’s the \$64 dollar word today.

But it's not just a word. It's where the rubber of faith hits the road of life. All this is religious mumbo-jumbo unless we can live it day to day: unless we experience a transformation of our spirit.

So; can people change? Can we change? Helen Keller lost sight, speech and sound, due to a severe illness in infancy. She not only learned to read and write but graduated cum laude from Radcliffe College. Her limitations could have stopped her but she wanted a more meaningful, productive life. She leaned on Anne Sullivan, her friend and teacher, as well as God. Who do we need to lean on?

New beginnings, they happen all the time. My mother's blindness. Adoptions and foster parenting. Church officers: some are here who might never had imagined it but God had something else in mind.

Of course because they happen all the time, some of us think we have plenty of time. "We do not know what a day may bring forth..." But even if we have plenty of time, why wait?

In 1888 Alfred Nobel discovered his own name in an obituary notice, although he was very much alive. It was a careless mistake, as it was Nobel's brother who had died. But the notice had trumpeted that "The dynamite King" was dead. The mistake revealed to Alfred Nobel that of this the world looked on the inventor of this explosive as someone who got rich by dealing death. So he resolved to change, and he did. His new will and testament left his fortune to establish and award that reflected his deepest convictions about the real purpose of life's ideals. That was the inception of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Will you let god get hold of you? God yearns that we know ourselves as "Beloved", and allow our spirit to be transformed by God's Holy Spirit that we may have the life we desire and the life God desires.

Amen.