

This summer we've been talking about our need for a "stem cell transplant"

That in the US, our DNA was founded on violence and oppression—war, natives, slaves
That the violence of our beginnings continues to play out today—as we see in the news
We need each other and we are interdependent
The power of prayer to change us and to come against the powers and principalities
Giving up our need to be right—to respect others and work for long term and real change
We must practice a lifestyle of forgiving people
We stand together in reconciled diversity
Through Jesus sacrificial death on the cross—the power and hold of sin over us has been broken

This week I was going through old files in an effort to clean off my desk

I found a file from a visit to Church of the Savior in 1997 with other young adults from NWYM
One of the leaders we spent time with was from South Africa
She was white and had grown up with Apartheid—and actively participated in it
As an adult she became a pastor in a white church in South Africa
But over time she changed—ultimately acting for change and marching in protests
Each Sunday they burned an Amnesty International candle for a named injustice
The work was so difficult that it exhausted her and she came to the US for respite
But I was particularly curious about what changed her
From being a supporter of apartheid to working to eradicate apartheid
She said it was when she realized that her black peers had something to teach her
Recognizing that black pastors who were her peers could speak into her life
With that, she could no longer see them as "less than"
She was compelled to accept them as equals

What changes us?

When we look at scripture, we see many stories of transformation...

- Paul with his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus—persecutor to leader of the church
- Peter—from fisherman to disciple to leader of the church, ultimately changed by the Holy Spirit
- Mary Magdalene—after Jesus casts out 7 demons she becomes a follower and provider for Jesus
- Matthew—tax collector who became one of Jesus' 12 disciples
- Zacchaeus—tax collector who pays back 4 times that which he took by fraud
- Woman had to go alone to the well because of a poor reputation, tells all what Jesus did for her
- Forgiven woman who washes Jesus' feet with tears and dries them with her hair
- Nicodemus, Pharisee—Jesus tells of new birth, then brings 100 pounds of spices to Jesus' burial
- Thomas who didn't believe until he saw the resurrected Jesus
- Stephen—we only see him post transformation as a man "full of grace and power"
- Cornelius, a Gentile—the Holy Spirit was evident in his life when Peter visits him
- James, brother of Jesus, does not believe in him—but later is a key leader in the church, Acts 15

What changes us?

I've thought about my own journey

For me, it begins with my parents telling me that Jesus loves me—and believing it as a child

My natural inclination to want to do what's right and follow God—often a positive movement
But also many trips to the altar and efforts on my part to get it right—not so positive

Decisions I've made—didn't want to be a negative person, particularly as a single woman
Conscious decision to built positive relationships

Early morning wake up call when I realize it is a spiritual moment and invitation to Listen
Get up and journal my life story—feeling affirmed for who I am

Aware of the invitation and grace to make necessary changes in my life—no condemnation

Following the "I just want to" in life and discovering that it is Leading
Entered seminary without knowing why and ended up becoming a pastor

Healing of past wounds—recognizing those wounds keep me acting as if it will happen again
Praying with a friend—naming the injuries caused and seeing Jesus heal them

Dream that is so real, I realize it is a spiritual dream and pay attention to the message

But then there are those 10 years when I held God at arms length, resisting intimacy with God
But in hind sight, I changed laterally—focused more on people and relationships

What changes us?

As we move to open worship—I want to open the conversation and invite us to all consider the question

What changes us?

When and how have we experienced transformation?

What blocks change?

How do we move through the impediments or the fog?

What motivates us to keep moving through?

Do we recognize transformation as having occurred?

What is the catalyst for change?

Are we willing to be willing to change?

What changes us?