

"Metamorphosis"

Text: Romans 12:1-8

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, enabling you both to recognize and to live your lives in harmony with the profound change that he has already worked in each of you. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Old joke, but applicable: *How many German Lutherans does it take to change a lightbulb?* Answer: "What's all this talk about 'change'?" It's interesting that while some of us don't really like change all that much, the majority seem to believe that "change is good." It's a testament to something; I'm not quite sure what. Maybe humanity's natural optimism. Those who welcome change tend to *assume* that change will be for the better. Or maybe it's a product of mankind's natural arrogance – we also believe we *deserve* to have things change always and only for the better. Yet pretty much every bad thing that has ever happened would constitute "change," and lots of bad stuff has happened. Change came when Eve ate from the forbidden tree, when the Children of Israel began worshipping the idols of Canaan, and when Samson got a haircut. No good came from those changes. In more modern times, change was ushered in on December 7, 1941 and on September 11, 2001, and in late winter of last year in Wuhan, China. Again, not a lot of good came from those changes.

Yet the human race continually and inexplicably advocates change, no matter how good things are or how well the current system is working. Our country grew to be the envy of the entire planet, so by all means let's change it to something that has universally failed wherever it has been tried. One man–one woman unions produce stable family groups and form the bedrock of every prosperous society, so let's change all that and see what happens. Discipline in the home produces well-adjusted children and model future citizens, so let's remove that discipline and just see what that change brings. You get the picture. Not all change is good. In fact that's part of the change cycle, isn't it? Adopting *harmful* changes guarantees that we will keep playing around with the system, supposing that someday we will get it just right. And even if we do, we'll undoubtedly just change it again, expecting always something better.

The basic problem, of course, is sin. Mankind broke God's perfect creation, and did so based on the mistaken notion that change would bring improvement ("**You will be like God, knowing good and evil.**"). One of the inevitable results of that particular change is that *nothing* on earth will ever again be perfect; nothing will ever again be "just right." Even when something is as good as sinful man can ever get it, human beings carry this natural

assumption that even *that* can always be improved. In a sense that is true, but not in the way the godless imagine. Human beings are not born good and perfect – ruined only over time by other human beings. God's Word tells us that human beings are born thoroughly sinful in every imaginable way. *One* change is therefore required – *required* – if we are to escape the consequences of our natural sinfulness. Our text for this morning speaks of that necessary change, labelling it with a word that we should come to understand and treasure: *metamorphosis*. Our text is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Twelfth Chapter:

ESV **Romans 12:1-8** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ ¶ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

These are God's Words. Remind yourself each time you hear or read words from the Bible that it is God himself who is speaking to you. Since that same God has told us, "**Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it!**" so also as we prepare our hearts to hear and study these words of our God, and to gain the blessings he offers, we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

Hard to escape the fact that we are in an election year. I'm not sure I've ever heard a non-incumbent politician who did not promise "change." The message is always, "*Elect me and I will deliver change!*" – and by that they mean *direction*. They have to convince the majority that we are headed in the *wrong* direction. They know that voters won't elect them if they admit that the current office holder has us moving in the right direction.

Christians in particular need to understand the difference between "change" and "better." We were *changed* when we were brought to faith, but that doesn't mean there is no room for improvement, for "better." There are many things, for example, that I hope and pray never change here at St. Paul. I pray that your confidence in Jesus Christ as your only Savior

only and ever grows stronger. *Stronger*, not different. Better, not changed. You have always demonstrated a loving concern for those called to serve you. Keep up the good work. You have consistently demonstrated a devotion to the financial support of the gospel ministry in this area and synodically. You glorify your Lord by taking excellent care of this house of worship and the surrounding grounds. The list goes on. We always want to strengthen such God-pleasing resolve, but that's not the same as "change."

Our text talks about the one necessary change that had to take place in every human being. That's what that word "*metamorphosis*" is all about (which our text translated as "**transformed.**") We had to be "**transformed**" (changed) from our natural condition as children of evil to children of God. We had to be converted. The word "*conversion*" has as its basic meaning a complete change of direction - a 180 degree turn. Instead of being headed for hell, the soul that is changed through conversion is headed for heaven. That's the *metamorphosis* that took place at our conversion, but we need to explore this a bit more to do justice to all that changed at our conversion.

God's Word tells us that many things become immediately available to the human being who has been converted that are not available to the unbeliever. The first privilege is that God will hear you whenever you communicate with him. This communication with God is of course called prayer, and the Bible tells us that true prayer is the sole possession of the believer. "**No one comes to the Father, but by me**" Jesus told us in John 14:6. At conversion we gain access to God the Father, the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of heaven and earth. The unbeliever, as we read in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, prays only "**with himself.**"

The *second* great benefit of conversion is that only after conversion can you do a truly good work. The unbeliever can perform many socially beneficial "good deeds," but that is all that they are - social acts of goodness. A truly good work, in the eyes of God and by his definition, can only be done out of love for the Savior you have come to know at your conversion. We read in Hebrews 11:6, "**Without faith it is impossible to please God...**" A good work is therefore something we do to thank God for the change (the metamorphosis) that he has already worked in us.

The *third* great benefit is the knowledge and confidence that only those who have experienced this metamorphosis play a role in God's arrangement of the events of this world. In other words, when you are converted, from that point on and forever thereafter, you can have confidence that "**all things work together for good.**" Not just for *some* but for *you*, for *your* good. God has promised *you, personally*, that he will make everything that happens work in some good, positive way toward your eternal benefit.

Finally, only the converted Child of God can truly love God and want to thank him with obedience. Before conversion, all human beings are God's enemies,

in open rebellion against their Creator. It is only after we are brought to faith that we can love God and even *want* to submit and live according to his will.

What all of this means is that at conversion we are truly and lastingly *changed* – "**transformed.**" At our metamorphosis we were changed from creatures that love only sin and evil, to children of God – sons and daughters who love what is good, right, and holy.

This brings us to the profound conflict between those two key words found in this morning's text: **Conform** and **Transform**. "**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.**" At conversion we do not shed our sinful side - our old Adam or sinful flesh. That sinful side continually wars with the new man that is born in us at conversion. The old Adam, remember, is never converted, never changed. Conversion was the powerful working of God's Holy Spirit as he created something *new* in us. Our old Adam, unfortunately, was not affected by this metamorphosis. It even now rages against the new man in us, that part in the Christian that no longer needs change. Our sinful flesh now wants to prevent us from ever doing what our new man urges us to do. This war within us is seldom more intense than when we are tempted by those things for which the godless live. We are supposed to be "**in the world, but not of the world.**" How exactly do we do that? Do we renovate the old, or start over new? The old Adam says, "*Keep the old and adapt – as little as possible.*" The new man understands that we are new creations. *The old cannot be salvaged.*

The new man is right, of course, but that evil side in each of us can be very convincing, to the point that we often find ourselves wishing we could salvage some of the old ways. That never works.

That's why our text spoke of "**transformation**" as opposed to "**conformation.**" The devil continually lobbies for *conformation*. He wants us to compromise us in such a way that we "**have a form of Godliness, but deny its power.**" (2 Timothy 3:5) He wants us to try to cling to and love everything that is of this world and just rearrange a few things here and there. His sales pitch is this: "*You can have it both ways. You can do what the world does and love God all at the same time. You can devote yourself, your time and your treasure, to both. In fact you can still lust and covet and steal and hate, but now, instead of 'sin' you just call it 'Christian weakness' and convince yourself there is no other way.*"

We've all heard that "voice" for ourselves. It is the near constant force that makes us want to conform. It is what makes us want to indulge our every desire – just like the godless – and rationalize that we can do so and still remain Christians and heirs of heaven. The problem is that most of what the world knows as fun, pleasure, and entertainment, God calls *sin*. And

God hates sin. The Holy Spirit through John did not tell us in 1 John 2:15: **"Do not love the world or anything in the world"** and **"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"** because he doesn't want us to be happy. He said it because he knows we cannot love and live for *sin* and still love and live for him. Both are masters, and we cannot serve two masters.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of our metamorphosis – the profound change that has been accomplished in us. For us, it changed absolutely everything. It is, for example, only the heart made glad and sure by being born again in conversion that can *willingly* give up what was once so precious to us, and to regard all that truly is evil as evil.

Our text provided this incredible summary: **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."** That last phrase can also be translated: **"This kind of worship is appropriate for you."** That's exactly what we are talking about here, isn't it? We appropriately *worship our God* by daily beating our old Adam into submission and by **"presenting our bodies as living sacrifices."** What a perfect and unique way of summing up the life and focus of those who have undergone this amazing metamorphosis. Old Testament sacrifices were all killed. Today we go on living – an ongoing sacrifice as we dedicate ourselves, heart and soul, to the service of our God – struggling daily to conform not to the world but to the perfect will of our Savior.

Can we do *better*? Of course, but not because we have the direction wrong. We now know our Savior, Jesus Christ, and we have been given faith to believe that that same Jesus Christ lived and died to pay the horrible price for all of our sins. We now not only stand forgiven in his sight, we have been transformed, and we therefore, according to our text, are now able to **"discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."** That means, among other things, that we have been blessed with the ability to be *in* the world but not *of* the world, as we treasure the suffering and death of Jesus Christ above all else.

The rest of our text just encourages us to go all in – to dedicate ourselves completely to our Savior's service, according to our own individual gifts. No matter our station or calling, God help us to employ all of those amazing gifts wholeheartedly and to the best of our ability. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Isaiah 51:1-6** "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. ³ For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. ⁴ "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

ESV **Matthew 16:13-20** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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The 12th Sunday after Pentecost – August 23, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 398 (Red Hymnal)

"Renew Me, O Eternal Light"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 51:1-6) Eyes blinded by unbelief will never be able to recognize that Old Testament readings apply not only to the ethnic nation of Israel but to what Scripture refers to as the "Spiritual Israel" – which includes all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This knowledge opens the Christian to a whole new level of understanding in connection especially with the Old Testament scriptures. This truth is made clear especially in the final verses of this reading.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 45 (Page 32) (Read responsively)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 16:13-20) Jesus told us that He would build His Church on the confession of Peter: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."** Jesus told Peter that he was blessed by God to have received this understanding and conviction, for it was given to him by God himself. Do you now also know Jesus to be the Christ? You too then have been blessed in the same way by God himself.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 400 (Red Hymnal)

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 12:1-8 (Printed on the back page)

"Metamorphosis"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 311 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 644 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (29) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Outreach Committee Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Ben Libby is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Living Savior of Eden Prairie has called Pastor Luke Bernthal. Bethel of Morris has called Pastor Thomas Schuetze.

Church Council Notes – Four members of the Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the August 16 meeting. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for July were \$2,539 below budgeted needs, and are now \$234 below budgeted needs YTD. A list of church projects is being compiled, to be completed by volunteers this fall. The Council voted to resume serving drinks and snacks during the fellowship hour, and to resume our regular schedule after Labor Day. A volunteer is still needed to upgrade the church website. Next Council meeting is September 15 at 7pm and there is a Voters Meeting scheduled for September 27.

Sunday School Teachers – Please see Pastor Roehl if you would be willing and able to teach Sunday School for the 2020-2021 school year.

Projects List – See the list on the mailbox table of projects in and around the church that need to be completed this fall.

Outreach Committee Meeting – The Outreach Committee is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.