

Pentecost Sunday School Lessons

Sermon Series: “Psalms of the Spirit”

Date: June 21st

Topic: Transformation

Open with prayer

Before reading...

What does it mean to be transformed into something new?

Main Scripture: Psalm 51:1-17

(Reading is attached)

Opening Questions:

- What is the main theme of this Psalm?
- What is the writer seeking from God? What do they acknowledge about his/her-self?
- What do the closing verses say about the blessings and promises of God?

Traditional interpretation of this Psalm:

Traditionally this Psalm has been attributed to David, King of Israel following the incident between David, Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite. While many kings and rulers in the ancient world had concubines and sexual harems, even the king could not have relations with another man's wife. In moving against Uriah, David is violating the Law of God and the Law of Israel. Following the death of Uriah and the marriage of David to Bathsheba, David is confronted by one of the priests. Rather than directly calling David out, the priest tells David a parable about a rich and poor shepherd. When the priest tells David of the injustice between the shepherds, David demands vengeance. The priest points out that David is the unjust shepherd in regards to Uriah. The psalm is placed best in the context of this Hebrew Bible narrative, showing both the nature of David's sin and the deep desire to repent and be cleansed by God.

Scripture commentary:

For the Psalmist, the most important aspect of a relationship with God is to be contrite and humble. Even when the most heinous of sins has been committed, the Psalmist sees the possibility of redemption and transformation. The opening line itself declares a repentant spirit, “Have mercy on me...”, moreover a few verses later, “Against you, you alone, have I sinned...” The overall feeling of the Psalm is passive, but focused. The Psalmist feels as though the nature of the sin that has been committed has in some way separated God and the individual. The Psalmist worries back and forth about if the relationship can be repaired. Finally, the tone of the Psalm changes to deliverance with the Psalmist stating that God can do the new work of transformation. The final line realizes the promise of transformation with the Psalmist stating that only becoming humble and contrite can lead to the promised transformation by God.

- Why is a humble and contrite heart important to be in a relationship with God?
- Why do people feel as though their sin or wrongs separate them from God?

- Why is transformation important to one's relationship with God?

Reflection:

Transformation is one of the primary means by which persons enter into a relationship with God. It happens within individuals, families, communities, churches, and even large groups: the Holy Spirit can make amazing and definitive changes. As the Psalmist believes, even what seems like the most awful situation or difficult setting can be redeemed. The cry of the writer for God to “have mercy” and “forgive” is not just a refrain, but is a deep yearning for change. Transformation occurs when the heart and spirit are open, not closed. For David, transformation came in the realization of his brokenness and need for repentance. For many of us today, transformation comes when we lay aside our preconceptions and embrace that which we cannot see. While we try hard to transform on our own, we must allow God's spirit to move or the transformation will never move beyond an idea.

- What does it feel like to be transformed?
- What prevents us (or our communities) from experiencing God's transformation?
- What have you had to lay aside to allow God to begin a work of transformation?

Closing:

Consider this question again:

What does it mean to be transformed into something new?

Close with prayer.

Psalm 51

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.