

Series: ReFocus  
May 23, 2021  
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Discipleship, Vision,  
Luke 6:39-40

This is Pentecost Sunday. This usually happens 50 days after Easter. What is special about Pentecost Sunday, it celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and what is generally considered the birth of the church.

When Jesus was with the 12 key disciples who would be known as the first apostles he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. This was going to be a fulfilment of the promise God himself had made long before Jesus walked alongside the disciples: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit poured out on ALL people, that men and women would prophesy, that the young would see visions and the old would have dreams

So the disciples were gathered in obedience to Jesus in an upper room in Jerusalem waiting on this promise and the power of the Holy Spirit fell on them. And this is what birthed the church.

We have been in our vision series's Refocus. And this is what we are talking about. What we have been doing is placing the future of Trinity Vineyard firmly in the original calling of the church. What is the church, any church, called to be?

The church was born to join God in his mission of bringing the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Trinity Vineyard is about bringing life to the city of Nakuru. And that life is only found in the Kingdom of God. We are about: seeing the Kingdom come in Nakuru as it is in heaven.

What I have tried to also shape in us is that when Jesus walked around he said that the Kingdom has come and offered a different vision of life, life in the Kingdom, the same life Trinity hopes to be part of bringing to Nakuru.

Yet the truth about this life. If we are to enter into the life of Jesus and also bring out the life of Jesus around us, what the Bible sometimes calls streams of living waters flowing from us, we need to learn from Jesus.

Listen, everywhere you go, there is a vision of life being offered. The BBI was a vision of life. Your favourite politician or political party offers a vision of life... Hollywood and Bollywood offer a certain vision of life.

This city offers you a vision of life. Nairobi offers a certain vision of life. You can pick us 'people of Nai' from anywhere.

In University there were strangers I thought I knew only to realise that it is because we came from the same city and so they felt familiar. We had been formed similarly.

There are visions of life all over. Jesus also offered a vision of life called life in the Kingdom of God. And it is so different from all the other visions offered all over the place. If you want the life of the Kingdom of God it means taking up the vision of life Jesus offers.

And to enter into this vision is done by apprenticing under Jesus or what is called becoming disciples of Jesus. The way to become disciples of Jesus is by spending time with Jesus, becoming like Jesus and that is the transformation we want to see and then doing what Jesus Did and that is joining him in his mission.

So we are making this invitation that as a church and as individuals we would orient our lives around:

1. Being with Jesus
2. Becoming like Jesus and
3. Doing what Jesus Did.

Being with Jesus means we have to intentionally cut out time and space in our day to spend time in his presence. Look at your schedule to know if you are being with Jesus.

Becoming like Jesus is an invitation to transformation. Because where the Spirit of Jesus is Lord, there is freedom and transformation from one glory to the next. To see the fruits of the Holy Spirit born in us. To see in us the life we admire in Jesus. Joy, peace, patience, non-anxious presence, gentleness and oneness with the father.

And doing what Jesus Did is about just like him declaring and demonstrating the Kingdom of God. It is telling people of the Good news of the Kingdom, healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, partying with the lost and rejected, raising the dead.

For this reason, the church exists. This vision of life is what you are being invited to. And all of these things take practice and that is what we have been emphasising the last few weeks.

Today I wanna talk a bit about how that transformation happens.

We started this series with me talking about how sad it is to see around the world the frustrating truth. There are so many followers of Jesus sadly sometimes there seems to be very little transformation.

For many people, Sunday morning at the church is very different from Sunday night in their homes. And their kids are walking away from faith because they could not reconcile this.

National Prayer days are very different from National Election Days and people are wondering how the church can be caught up in some of the things we have seen on the media that is often nothing like Jesus.

So the question I wanna us to talk about is: is transformation even possible? Can we really become like Jesus?

Paul an apostle of Jesus who wrote a lot of what we call the New Testament today writes that where the Holy Spirit is there is freedom and we get transformed to be like Jesus from one glory to the next.

And this for him it is not just words. When we meet Paul, then going by the name Saul, he is a zealous Jewish Rabbi who is so against Jesus and his followers. So much so, he oversaw their oppression. He has them imprisoned and even Killed.

But then this very Paul meets Jesus, puts his faith in him, receives the Holy Spirit and some about 10 years later, he is so transformed. He loves Jesus, planting churches, teaching and following the way of Jesus and doing the things that Jesus Did. He is even imprisoned because of this and dies for it.

So for him, this transformation is not just 'talk'. It is not only possible, it is the only way to live. So how do we get there?

The first thing I want us to get is that formation is not a church or Christian or religious thing. Formation is simply a human thing. You are being formed into something. The only question is what? Or who?

If you wake up, go to work or school, just do life and go to bed for the next 20 years, over time through your life experiences, you will be formed into something.

We are being formed by the stories you have believed, your habits and your relationships. That is what we call unintentional formation.

Here is why stories are powerful, human beings are narrative animals. We like movies and shows because they tell us a story. We experience events but what is important is our interpretation of them. Our narrative of them. We hear the truth yet what is most important is our interpretation of it, rather our narrative of it. Human beings are narrative animals.

Let me give you an example. A friend of mine said to me that they could never vote for candidate X because his tribespeople would have done terrible things if they were president. Like, walk into our shops as if they opened and pick anything they wanted.

And you have similar stories going both ways in Kenya around politics. Here is what I want you to see, Who they have become as in by how they vote and how they feel about that tribe has clearly been shaped by a story or narrative they believe. And we see that play in Kenya every 5years. See the stories we have believed as a people has formed our country.

But it is not just around politics. Our narratives around sex, marriage, money, family, God the narratives you have bought into are and have shaped you and how you live today.

Let's talk about your habits. A few weeks ago I said that the things you do, do something to you. Your habits shape your loves and desires. The more you do something, the more you want to do it.

No one likes coffee the first time they try it. But out of social pressure, they keep doing and soon enough they stop putting sugar in it and they think it is the drink of heaven. In fact, the proper worship posture is one hand raised to heaven and the other holding a coffee mug for urban people. What happened? Their habits, what they have done repeatedly, have shaped who they have become.

Yet that is neutral. Think about habits you know you should not do, why you keep doing them is because we wanna do what we do a lot. It shapes our physical brain. That thing you do thinking you will stop when you get married is shaping what you love. What you think you will stop when you become 40 you will only wanna do more of it.

Actually what we love is often more powerful than what we know. How many people know they should cut down on their drinking and yet nothing changes? How many doctors know that smoking is and yet they are like buses from the '60s? How many things do you know you should not do but yet you do them anyway?

Even Paul, an apostle in the early hints at this struggle in his own life. He says,

“What I want to do, I do not do and that which I do not wanna do I keep doing.”

This was a guy full of the Holy Spirit, yet there was this tension in his life. Guess what, our habits are way more powerful than what we know because they shape our loves and desires. You will want to do more of what you do habitually.

The other bit that is forming us is our relationships. We influence each other. We have said that through proverbs and sayings in every culture and it has been proven scientifically.

And the greatest influence in your life is your family of origin. Whether you come from a great family or from a broken family they have shaped who you are today. How you relate with God and quite frankly your spouse or your date and other people around you is shaped by this place of origin. Some people try to run so far from their family only to realize they are living just like their family.

And then the friends we choose. You start talking like your friends, you eat where they eat and live like them.

Over time these three, our habits, the stories we have believed and our relationships, chiefly form us through our life experiences. They form us in a certain direction. So our following Jesus is not happening in a vacuum. If you have been alive for whatever, 20, 30, 40 years these 3 things have been forming you.

So when you say yes to Jesus, the work is now going against all that and the ongoing pressure of all of it at the same time. That is why the word the Bible uses is transformation. We are going against the current.

This city has some stories or narrative. Your family has them too. Our culture, our generation has narratives that describe its vision for life. We are born into all of that. Then we have had years of habits that have formed us. And the pressure into the habit of people around us. Your family and close relationships also cement all of this.

So we are being formed into something. Or put another way, we are all disciples or apprentices of something or someone. Either of Jesus or our culture or your favourite politician. Doing nothing does not stop your formation, it only leads to unintentional formation.

Take a look at this

*He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they, not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*

**Luke 6:39-40**

Everyone listening to Jesus would have gone, definitely not. The blind cannot lead the blind. Now a bit of context, Jesus often called the Pharisees blind. He is saying that following them is just going into a hole. Their vision of life is blind. And the best that will happen is that you will turn out exactly like what you follow not better.

Here is what it means for us. We are followers of something. Jesus is saying all of those are just blind guides. If we are disciples of our culture, the best we will be is just like our culture. Nothing better. Take a look at what your culture produces, at what your generation produces at what your country produces.

If it produces anxious, individualistic, greedy, oversexualized, tribal people you will at best become that. Because it is blind culture, leading to nowhere good and the student can only be as good as their teacher. If you do nothing do not be surprised if this is what you become despite all you want?

Here is another idea in that Scripture. You can be fully formed or you can be half-formed. You can be a disciple of Jesus and not fully formed. In a lot of ways, we all are not fully formed. It takes a lifetime of following Jesus.

And in other ways, it is talking about how some of us in our culture because we go to church or had a great time of worship we think that's it. We are good, even though we are seriously malformed.

And here are two myths that I want us to do away with because they lead to a lot of believers just being half-formed or not even pursuing formation.

So many people have believed that they could simply think their way into becoming like Jesus. All you need to do is study scripture and quote it and hit people over the head with it.

And do not get me wrong, there is a huge part of our transformation that comes with reading the word of God. We are letting the worldview of Jesus and the word of God shape our worldview. But you cannot know or think your way into transformation. After all, what we love is often more powerful in our lives than what we know to be true. And what we love is shaped by what we do repeatedly aka habits. So it will take a lot more than just reading scripture and knowing God's word.

What did Jesus often teach? Those who hear my word and put them to practice. It has never been just about knowing or hearing God's word. You have to then do God's word in and out of season. Something that we will explore a bit more next week.

This myth tells people that all we need is enough encounters with God. Now, this one is complicated. It is a reaction to religiosity. It makes people uncomfortable because we have

lived through ways of doing church that made people feel less of God's children if they did not do certain things or if they still struggled with sin. It is the lie that we could earn our salvation by what we do that got people to this myth.

And now people moved to the other extreme of just let God do it. Don't get me wrong it is not that we cause ourselves to change. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, there is no change in us. It is instead stepping into what Joy talked about.

The invitation to partner with God. Or if I put it this way, without God we cannot, without us he won't. He is just not forceful. You cannot force love and adoration out of people. God knows that too well and if you have been married or are pursuing a relationship, you know that too well too.

Here is the thing, here is the mystery and good news. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are a new creation. God has already called out of us who he created us to be. When God looks at you he is not seeing anxious Betty, or lustful Edgar or prideful John. No, he is seeing his son and daughter completely formed into who Jesus has formed.

Now your journey around here is to daily step into that already existing reality and as you follow in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit, you become who you already are. And this takes intentional partnering with God. Without him, we can't and without us, he won't.

That means that there is some work to do. And often when we hear work we think of religion and because the message of Grace has been preached incompletely. I used to struggle with the letter written by James the brother of Jesus and Bishop of Rome where he says faith without works is dead. Come on James, this work thing. Then Paul teaching about working out our salvation. And I would just want Paul to be consistent.

The thing is, the two are not opposed. Grace is not opposed to working. It is opposed to earning. By Grace, we have already been made Holy and now we are invited to partner with God, working out our salvation. You are invited to partner with God

We partner with God by being intentional in those 3 areas of formation in our lives. The stories we believe, the habits we have and the relationships we are in. We partner with God in these areas and then over time, through the power of the Holy Spirit we begin to see in us formed what God has already called us to be

In place of the stories we have believed, we must have proper teaching. That is why we sit together in church and share the word. The early church often met to listen to the apostles teach. Proper teachings replace the stories we have believed.

And it's not just about great ideas that are good for tweets. Proper teachings give us a different and compelling vision for life. This is why Jesus was a great teacher. Not only did he have unusual authority his teaching gave a different vision called the Kingdom of God in which life was very different. It turned life upside-down from that of the society, it was compelling and revolutionary.

For example, his teachings called the sermon on the mount where he called the poor blessed in a world where wealth gave you voice. He called the meek blessed where might

equal right. He called peacemakers blessed where again might makes right. This was a different vision that was compelling. That is what proper teaching does.

In place of our habits, we bring in the practices of Jesus. For example, our anxiety-producing habits can be replaced by practices that bring peace. We can make part of our practice prayer, fasting, praying for the sick. These are habits that form us into something.

If we have sinful habits of the commission we replace them with practices of Jesus that teach us to abstain like fasting and silence and solitude. If we have sinful habits of omission we replace them with practices of Jesus that teach us to get engaged like praying for the sick, hospitality and such.

What is the idea? The things you do, do something in you. You become what you habitually do. What you practice over and over again shape what you love and shape what you desire to then do over and over again. If you struggle to pray, if it becomes a practice in place of some harmful habits over time you might start enjoying prayer.

And then in the place of random relationships, we step into an intentional community. A community in which we are loved, we are encouraged, we are challenged and delight. Transformation does not happen in isolation. You need to surround yourself with a loving community of Jesus followers. What does this look like?

Well, we see in the early church that it was both a big gathering like this one weekly and a small intimate gathering of people in a home around a table. Both and.

Coming here on Sunday morning is not enough. You can hide in this crowd even with the social distancing. You need to be around people who know what your joy is and what your struggle is. That is what our date for 8 groups was about. That is what people call small groups or community group. You need those.

Then together with that small group, you all are part of a bigger family of the church. So come together for teaching, and empowering and celebration and to together do justice in a way that an individual or a small group could not. So you need the big church too.

The invitation is to partner with God in our transformation. God loves working with us. It delights him. He delights in you. Every time he looks at you, He sees an already transformed you but as you are today, you do not yet know how to live that life. So he is inviting you into formation.

So most importantly today,

1. You will not think your way into Christlikeness
2. God is inviting your participation

The good news is that God is doing the heavily lifting. All this happens as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. We have no strength of our own to bring transformation in our lives. And the Holy Spirit is promised to all.

*And on the first Pentecost we see something powerful. It is Peter who preaches had just a few weeks before that denied Jesus. The Holy Spirit is not a reward for good behaviour and unwavering faith. The Holy Spirit is a gift to those who turn to Jesus and wait on Him*

**Rich Villodas**

Let's Pray