

## 9/11 Transformed in Christ

The Reverend Peter F. Walsh  
September 11, 2011, 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our lives be holy transformed in you O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

### **The Place to be on a Complicated Day**

Good morning. It is great you are here. You have come to the right place. St. Mark's is a place of grace and this is a good-for-your-soul gathering. This is no day to be home alone with your television watching the endless nightmarish reruns and listening to the endless media midrash. It's a day to be in church with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is so-called "Kick-off Sunday" but we might have called it "Complicated Sunday". We have the painful emotions of 9/11 and the happy-new-year-joy of beginning a new program year. We have the "Jesus Wept" banner that was in the church soon after 9/11 and we have the blessing of backpacks. But that is how real life is – all mixed up – the good, the bad and the ugly. We are doing the right thing to bring it all before the Lord. That is what the psalms do.

### **Transformation in Christ**

This year's parish program goes right to the heart of the spiritual matter of our lives. It is designed to lead each of us into a deeper encounter with our Lord. The program is entitled "An Invitation to Transformation in Christ: The 2011-2012 Challenge to take the Next Step". It is unlike anything we have ever

done before. It provides a two-pronged path toward Transformation in Christ – one that is communal and journeyed together with other members of St. Mark's and one that is personal and journeyed in the privacy of your own heart. The program is powerful. It is for everybody, not just church junkies. You can do at home or on the train or the plane.

If you take "The 2011-2012 Challenge to take the Next Step" in your spiritual journey, this program, by the grace of God, can change your life. It can feed your hungry soul with the grace of God. Make a new year's resolution. Begin today. You will not be disappointed.

You may say what is Transformation in Christ? Spiritual transformation is what we all yearn for. Did you ever have the feeling that there is something more out there or in there or somewhere? Something more to life? Some higher calling? Some greater occupation than pre-occupation? Some better way to be? Some progress you want to make?

Billions of people search and seek to fulfill that yearning. Some empty themselves. Some fill themselves. Some read. Some go to yoga. Some eat or exercise or work or drink. The place for us to go is not to the gym or the bar or the bookstore. The place to go is to Church and the person to seek is Jesus Christ. He is the soul satisfaction that we yearn for.

He is the transformative element in our lives.  
He is the yeast that makes our Spirit rise.

Spiritual transformation is the heart of the Gospel. It is the soul's deepest need, life's highest calling, and the primary work of the Church and the center of our vision as a parish to be *a church bursting with disciples who are so transformed by the Holy Spirit that they live to give for the love of the Lord.*

Spiritual transformation is that amazing grace that we just sang about, where the pieces of the human puzzle make sense in God, not as singular mystical moment, but as a life movement that is present now and continues through eternity.

Spiritual transformation is a process that results in the re-booting of psyches so that we may grow into the full stature of Christ and claim the highest calling of our lives. To live to give for the love of the Lord is to be caught up in a loop of love that brings meaning and energy, purpose and power, and joy to life.

When it comes to your spiritual life, do not settle for second best, for just believing or belonging. Jesus came that you might have life and have it abundantly. He came that you might be transformed, fully alive in God. But for that to happen you must engage in your faith life.

## 9/11

It is in this context that we come to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. If this year we at St. Mark's are going to the heart of the spiritual matter, what better place to begin than with than 9/11 – a day that is in continual need of transformation in Christ.

### **A Room called Remember**

Christ would tell us the place to begin this transformation of 9/11 is within ourselves. There is no transforming the world unless we ourselves are first transformed. Un-peaceful people do not bring about peace.

We all have a room called remember where we store our memories of 9/11. There, like a touch screen, we have video footage with feelings that can be replayed at a moment with the touch of a thought. For some these memories are nearly overwhelming. Some of you were in the terrifying tower. Some of you were in the neighborhood and fled on foot. Some of you were at home freaking out, waiting to see if your spouse or father would come home. Some did not come home; cars remained in the parking lot. Some of you were glued to the tube, watching the surreal nightmare unfold, watching the world as we knew it go up in flames. Some of you were at the impromptu service held here 10 years ago tonight. Some of you lost colleagues and friends. Some of you went to a numbing number of funerals. It was a nightmare and it was real and it was personal.

### **Personal**

In the 1970's Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, who wrote *The Gulag Archipelago*, gave a commencement address where he touched upon the power of the personal. He noted that most people are more upset about the death of their cat than all of the people who were tortured and killed in the Russian gulags because they had a personal relationship with their cat and not with those who were killed.

Such is the power of the personal. 9/11 was an evil unleashed in the name of God; a calamity of mass murder on our soil. And it was personal.

### **Personal Transformation in Christ**

That is the bad news, but the good news is that Transformation in Christ is personal too. It is personal because Jesus is personal. Our God is not a distant clock maker watching dispassionately from afar. The person of God in Christ is present to each of us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such is the power of the cosmic Christ, to be profoundly present to

each of us as persons. To know this is the beginning of having your life changed.

Transformation in Christ is not abstract magic. It is grace that grows out of a relationship and engagement with Christ. If you want to know how to transform your experience of 9/11 the formula is simple and profound. Transformation *in* Christ happens by putting Christ *in* to your thoughts, words, and deeds. To heal and transform your experience of 9/11, put Christ *into* that room called remember. Just be together over time and let the divine doctor do his work. Let grace happen and heal.

### **The Mind of Christ**

But grace does more than happen and heal. It changes us. It transforms us. Look at the author of *Amazing Grace* who went from being a slave trader to priest. Grace changes our mind. St. Paul tells us to “put on the mind of Christ”. The mind of Christ is different than our reptilian brain that is wired for resentment, retaliation, and revenge. The mind of Christ is different than the media midrash that is being broadcast today. The mind of Christ is different from every nationalist agenda of all time.

The mind of Christ is the mind of God. The words of Christ are filled with grace and filled with challenge. When it comes to 9/11, they lay out a great challenge for us – you know these words.

For instance, Jesus said, “If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matt. 5:39)

Jesus said “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.’” (Mt. 5:43-44)

Jesus taught us to pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Lord’s Prayer)

Jesus said “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you: but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt 6:14-15)

Look at the Gospel appointed for today. Is it a providential message from our Lord? How many times are we to forgive? Not seven but seventy times seven. In other words, without ceasing.

This is followed by the parable of the unforgiving debtor with its conclusion about the displeasure of our Lord if we do not forgive from our heart.

The Gospel message of forgiveness could not be clearer. Forgiveness is not an add-on or an option. It is central to the teachings of Jesus. Over and over Jesus teaches that in reaction to violence should be forgive and follow it by an act of grace. This is how we become children of God and the body of Christ in the world.

### **The Mind of Christ in a VUCA World**

The application of the mind of Christ is a great challenge in our Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous world where we fear for our safety, where evil is unleashed and where extremism is becoming the new norm. The global village is a dangerous place and New York City has credible threats this morning. And yet the call of Christ is firm. He did not back down in his life and his Gospel call to us does not back down today.

### **What does the Lord expect of us?**

So what are we to do?

Certainly the Lord expects us to listen primarily to his voice. We are not called to put on the mind of 9/11/2001 or the mind of

9/11/2011. We are called to put on the mind of Christ.

There may have been a sea change after 9/11 but 9/11 is not the defining moment that dictates our lives. Our lives are not to be dictated by a moment, but a person. Jesus expects to be that defining person in our lives. He expects us to be transformed in him and he expects us to be instruments of his grace and peace.

Certainly the Lord would like us to imitate St. Francis and to pray “Lord make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love.” Certainly the Lord would like us to imitate Francis who said “Preach the Gospel always and use words when necessary.”

Certainly the Lord expects us to work towards breaking the cycle of violence that is escalating like a world-wide tornado destroying lives, cultures, and communities. Let us remember that Jesus took up his cross to break the cycle of violence.

Certainly, the Lord expects the peoples of the Abahamic faiths must work to find common ground and common values. If we cannot live together, the world cannot live together. We are increasingly caught up in the Middle

East –“a cradle of extremisms, a region where extremism is the norm. Certainly, the Lord expects us to work towards a middle way in the Middle East.” (*The Middle Way*, Marinoff page xiii)

In all of these endeavors, our Anglican middle way can be a great grace, but first we must reclaim it and live it and model “unity in diversity and diversity in unity.”

### **Transform 9/11 in Christ**

Jesus wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. “Jesus wept” is the shortest sentence in the New Testament. This is the sentence our banner, designed by Gretchen Deans ten years ago, quotes. It is right for us to weep for the victims who died and the heroic first responders who were killed. But Jesus did not stay weeping. He moved on. He brought his friend back to life and used the event to demonstrate the glory of God.

That too is our calling. By the grace of God we are to work towards transforming the ugly events of 9/11 in Christ and to demonstrate the glory of god in the face of evil and death. It is a high and holy calling. We cannot do it alone. We can only do it if we put 9/11 in Christ and let amazing grace lead us on.