Spreading Transformation

Final in the series “Doing Our Part to Change the World”

# Scripture: 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2

# Key thought: Because we’ve been transformed, we’re excited to share the Good News with others.

# Intro:

## Only a boy

An old Scottish minister climbed wearily into the pulpit, bowed and dejected. He had just faced harsh criticism from one of his deacons who had said, “Sir, there is something radically wrong with your ministry. Only one person has been saved this year, and he is only a boy.” The words stung the old pastor because he too felt heartbroken that so few had responded to the gospel; yet he trusted God for the results. The service concluded and the weary man of God lingered in the church. The young lad saw him and waited behind.

“Please, sir….”

“Yes, Robert?”

“Do you think if I worked hard for my education that I could ever become a preacher?”

“God bless you my boy,” replied the old man amid his tears. “Yes, I think you will be a preacher!”

Fast forward several decades: an elderly missionary returns to London from Africa. He has pushed back the boundaries of geographical knowledge and brought chiefs and their whole tribes under the influence of the Gospel of peace. He has given those tribes the Bible in their own language; but most of all he has followed God with all his heart. Who was he? Robert Moffat-- “only a boy,” the deacon had said.

On one of those visits to England, Robert Moffat told about the need in Africa and one person who heard him was a young Scottish medical student named David. Robert’s vision to reach others with the good news of Jesus Christ pierced David’s heart. Robert explained, “There is a vast plain to the north where I have sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages were no missionary has ever been.” David heard that call and filled with the vision of what God wanted him to do, David asked Mr. Moffat, “Would I do for Africa?” The direction of a life had changed. The name of that student--- David Livingstone. David Livingstone became the next generation of missionary pioneer in Africa.

“Only a boy,” the old deacon had bemoaned; yet these two men Robert Moffat, and David Livingstone are a huge part of the reason why the southern part of Africa is one the bastions of Christianity today.

## The biggest factor

Over the last few weeks we have talked about the power of our individual and united service, our individual and united prayers, our individual and united giving to change the world. The power of these is amazing, it is true, above what we can imagine because God is in them. But put all together they do not explain the amazing reach of the church of Jesus Christ.

It is the factor that we talk about today that is the most critical. It is the multiplication of the ministry by the making of new disciples that is responsible for the exponential power of the Gospel in our world. When you and I do our part to help someone else discover what it means to follow Jesus, and then they do their part there is a multi-branched web of grace that is forged that has amazing power to change our world. This network of transformation can only be created as we spread the good news to others. This morning, I want us to delve into this passage because in it the apostle Paul encourages us with more reasons why it’s important for us to spread the good news of the gospel.

# We spread the Good News to others because: We know the positive changes God has made in us.

Let’s talk first about the personal reasons we have for spreading the good news. The first factor that motivates us to tell others about Jesus Christ is what has happened to us as we met Jesus. In this passage Paul underlines three facets of the transformation of his own life that drive him to tell other people about his relationship with Jesus. These same things drive him to encourage others, even seek to persuade them, to also become disciples of Christ. If one is uncomfortable with the verb “persuade,” I would point out that the Greek word is used repeatedly in the book of Acts to describe Paul’s ministry interaction actions with individuals and groups (Acts 13:43; 18:4; 19:26; 26:28). While we do recognize that ultimately it is only the Holy Spirit that can convince people to follow Jesus, I believe the word is used to encourage us to be actively involved in sharing the reasons for our faith. It is used to keep us from attempting to be passive witnesses, who never say anything. Certainly acting like Christians is a good and essential starting place, but we must also be willing to speak up and give a reason for the hope that is within us as Peter says.

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

## Learned to fear God

What are the personal reasons that motivated Paul to share his faith? First of all, Paul says he has learned to fear God. The Greek word translated as “fear” is used both for situations where a person is afraid and for the expression “to fear God.” The question arises, “What does the word mean in this latter expression?”

I think we can best learn about this by turning to the gospel story in Luke chapter 7. There Luke relates the story about a funeral procession for an only son. As the group was exiting the city, Jesus saw the situation and had great compassion upon the mother. He stopped the funeral procession and said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” (Luke 7:14). Then the Bible says, “Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen and among us!”” (7:16 NRSV). How would we describe the feeling that came over those who were there at that moment? I would say it was a mixture of reverence and awe probably combined with a little bit of fright at being in the presence of someone with that kind of power. That’s a good definition of what it means to fear God–To revere him; to be in awe of him; and to have a proper respect, even fear, before the one who is all-powerful and all-knowing and to whom we will one day give account.

Paul says that it is this “fear of God” that drives us to “perfect holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1). In the book of Romans, we learn that a lack “fear of God” is part of what leads people to continue in sin and bitterness and lead lives filled with lying and cursing (Romans 3:10-17).

But once we have this new regard for God, this “reverent fear” as Peter once described it (1 Peter 2:18), then we look at life differently. We are aware of our accountability to God. And we are aware that other people need that same perspective in order to find the moral and spiritual health that we have found.

## Reconciled to God

Another blessing that we have received that helps us to want to bring others to Jesus Christ is the gift of reconciliation to God. It is the Holy Spirit’s task through conviction to make us aware of the alienation that exists between us and our creator. Our rebellion against him, our insistence on going our own way and being our own boss–our own god, is creating a gulf between us and the true God. Our sins continue to pile up offenses against God.

Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. Rom 2:5 NIV

But in Jesus Christ, this gulf, this alienation, is gone. We have been reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19).

If, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Rom 5:10-11 NIV

Since this is the case; since this is the good news, we want to tell others. We are even more eager to share the Good News of God’s forgiveness with someone else than grandparents with a new child talk about, or a 10-year-old with a new bicycle to show off.

## Becoming a new creation

But Paul says there is more. Not only have we learned to respect and reverence God; not only have we received forgiveness and the resulting loss of our burdens of guilt and sin; but also God is renewing us constantly. Day by day we are experiencing new life! We are becoming in Paul’s words, a “new creation” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are experiencing a spiritual make over. Old attitudes are being replaced with new ones. We are shedding old sins and adopting new habits that grow out of the seeds sown by the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

We came to God with our lives a mess. He took them as they were and made something of them. We talk about what has happened to us because we want that for the people we love. We see the possibilities for the people we come in contact with. We want to help those who are struggling with similar difficulties. So we seek to persuade others to allow God’s new creation to begin in them!

Donna Doan was a missionary in Haiti, in the poorest part of Haiti, the island of La Gonave. Donna lived in the village of Anse a Galet on the coast of the island. Many people there were very poor. One such was an elderly lady who walked with a cane. Despite her feebleness, she sat down on the dirt road in front of the mission compound and waited for a handout to help her survive. Now it’s sometimes better for needy people to see alms as coming from another Haitian, so Donna took some money from a benevolence fund and gave it to her cleaning lady named Charitable. Donna also gave Charitable a small storybook tract written in Creole, the language of Haiti, explaining the way of salvation. Donna asked Charitable to find out if the elderly lady was a Christian. A few minutes later, Charitable returned with the money in her hand, “Mme. Dick,” that was the name by which Donna was known, “She told me she’s already a Christian, but she is sending the money for food back and asking if she can buy two more tracts to give to her grandchildren.” Donna was very touched by this woman’s willingness to sacrifice what was certainly survival money so that her grandchildren could have the gospel in a tract form. Of course, she sent the money back and the tracts as well. Donna commented, “Sometimes we wonder if we are here to teach or to learn.”

That elderly woman, though poor in this world’s goods was rich in God. She knew what it was to fear God and to love God. And more than she wanted food, she wanted her grandchildren to know what it meant to be disciples of Jesus. Oh that we could learn from her how precious and important it is to persuade others.

# We understand God’s plan

We have talked about motivators from the standpoint of our personal experience. Paul wants us also to learn why we should be motivated more from the perspective of our heavenly Father. What are God’s plans? What is God’s perspective on why we are to be doing what he has told us to do? From God’s point of view, what should be motivating us to share his message with other people?

## God's love compels us 5:14

First, the apostle John tells us,

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 1 John 4:16 NIV

God’s love is what drove Paul and God wants it to drive us as well. Whether Paul means God’s love for us or God’s love in us loving others does not really matter. It is God’s love that provides the energy for us to care about others. In one of Jesus’ parables, God is like the shepherd who seeks the one lost sheep while the 99 are safe in the fold (Luke 15:4-7). In another of Jesus’ parables, God is like the Father who welcomes home the repentant prodigal with loving arms thrown around his neck (Luke 15:11-32). Think of how the apostle John summarized the gospel.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NIV

A love like that compels us to go out to help others become followers of Jesus.

## God -- in Christ reconciling the world to himself 5:19

A second perspective of the heavenly Father that helps us to be motivated to do our job of reaching out on Jesus’ behalf to our world is to realize that God is already at work reconciling the world to himself. Jesus told us that his Father was always at work (John 5:17)! What is He doing? In this passage from second Corinthians, we learn one thing that God is at work doing. He is working to reconcile the world to himself. We who are witnesses to the saving grace of Jesus in our own lives are working with God in the great task of bringing the world back to God. We are on the greatest team in history working together with God at the greatest task ever assigned to a team.

## Now is the time of grace 6:2

The third perspective of our heavenly Father that we need is a time perspective. As every salesperson knows, people respond to time limitations. We hear such inducements regularly. “This sale is only good until Friday.” “This price expires at midnight on Sunday.” “I have four more people scheduled to look at this house this weekend.” Time consciousness creates urgency.

In this passage, Paul passes on to us the divine sense of urgency. Now is the time of God’s favor. We are living in the day of grace. The word for time is the Greek “Kairos” which means a particular time, a special time, a meaningful moment as opposed to just another clock tick. This is a precious opportunity that will not last. It is special for two reasons. First we never know when Jesus will come again and the day of grace which began with his first coming will end. Secondly, and perhaps even more critically, the time when the Holy Spirit is speaking to us about our response to God is a crucial time. It is the time for accepting. It is a moment of grace and divine favor. We may not sense that call again for anyone of dozens of reasons. And, when God leads us to share a witness, it is a precious opportunity that we may never have again. I learned this lesson early as a pastor. I visited a man in the hospital that I did to know and had not visited before. His situation had been grave but he was doing better and I expected to come back to see him again soon. The Holy Spirit whispered to share the plan of salvation but I was reticent to share so deeply on a first acquaintance. I made a mental note to share it the next time I visited and made my exit. As you might have guessed, the man died suddenly soon after and I never got to see him again. If only I had heeded the Spirit’s warning, “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”

# We eagerly anticipate the harvest of souls.

There is one more facet to the perspective that we need to be motivated to tell others the Good News. We also need to be able like Paul to see the vision of the result of our serving as God’s ambassadors. If we cannot see the wider vision, if we simply focus on our own salvation, the future of the church and the culture does not look good. As Methodist missionary, E. Stanley Jones put it;

“If religion hugs its safe harbors and gazes upon its entrancing vales of paradise, the wreckage of the future will be terrible.”
E. Stanley Jones in The Christ of Every Road p. 32

So what will happen if we fulfill our mission to be agents of reconciliation of Christ’s behalf? What will happen if we work to “make disciples” as Jesus commanded us?

## More people become new creations

First of all, more people will become transformed servants of God. The more people are being remade into Christ’s image, the more society is transformed.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Rom 10:13, 14

When we do our part, others will be led to call on the name of the Lord.

## More people become God's co-workers

Secondly, the more people who become Christians, the more coworkers God has in order to work transformation in our world. Jesus told us the current situation. People in the church can’t recognize those who are open to hear about Jesus. We think people are not open. But Jesus said,

Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. John 4:35 NIV

Jesus said this in the context of his ministry in the Samaritan village. A village of Samaritans was the last place that the disciples would’ve thought to minister. Yet after he spoke to the woman at the well Jesus was able to win many in that village to become his followers. But we are like the disciples. We don’t think of our world as ready to hear about Jesus. Maybe it’s not as ready as it used to be. Just like probably the Samaritan village did not enjoy the advantages that the Jewish villages did in terms of their knowledge of Jewish faith. Yet Jesus saw openness to respond. So in New England today. Despite some discouraging statistics, there are still many who are open to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The harvest is still ready. That is not the problem. There is another problem. Jesus spoke about this one too.

 “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matt 9:37-38 NIV

What is needed is exactly what happens when we help another person become a follower of Jesus Christ. Those who are persuaded become persuaders of others. Those who experience reconciliation to God become those who show the way for others to be reconciled to God. Those who become new creations in Christ themselves become ambassadors for the One who redeems and renews and recreates lives one at a time. The effect multiplies. The transformation mushrooms exponentially.

So for most if not all of us, helping another person come to know Jesus Christ as their own Savior is likely the greatest part that we will ever play in changing our world! We never know how far its effect will go. Generations upon generations may be affected by that one act of witness. That person you persuade to follow Jesus could be a child in our own house or a person in your neighborhood, or someone in your extended family, or a business associate. There could be many of them over the course of your lifetime.

# Conclusion

I conclude with a very short story called The Mailbox by Elsa Kok

It was a chocolate chip cookie kind of day. Dark clouds in the sky and nothing happening, the kind of day to curl up, eat a few cookies and take a nap. I had just taken a particularly large bite of my cookie when I heard the mailman pull up. I glanced out the slats of my window shade. Fun stuff? Or junk mail? Hard to tell at a distance. I went outside and opened the mailbox, pulling out a stack of mostly junk mail, a couple of bills, one card and one letter.

I opened the letter first. The name was unfamiliar. Inside was just one sheet of paper. Esther, one of my dear friends of years past, had died. "I found your name and some letters from you in her files," a woman wrote, "and I wanted to let you know that she passed away."

Tears welled up. Esther had come into my life just after my divorce. This older lady, feisty and passionate, had loved me in the best ways. She sat outside with me while I smoked my cigarettes; she played darts with me when I was lonely; she laughed at my silly jokes. She showed me Jesus. And her love for Him - and for me - helped bring me back to His heart.

I noticed the card, still in my other hand. I opened it.

Inside was a note from Micah, a friend in the women's group I led at church. Just recently I'd invited the group to ask Jesus into their lives. For the first time, Micah accepted Christ. She had sent the card to let me know.

I held the letter about Esther in one hand. I held the card from Micah in the other. Esther had poured into me and made a difference. I passed that on to Micah, letting Esther's love influence someone she'd never met.

Emotion overwhelmed me. The card and the letter reminded me that the one person I may reach out to today could influence a hundred others I will never meet.

It was no longer a chocolate chip cookie kind of day. It had escalated to the divine