

TRANSFORMED LIVING

Jesus goes toe to toe with Peter, who has taken Jesus aside to protect him from his journey to Jerusalem, to protect him from suffering and death. Peter had just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. But Peter, among the first to follow Jesus, the one who calls Jesus the Christ, is often lost and confused along the way. He leaves the nets to follow, but then, on the mountain, he wants to enshrine Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He is the first to try faith's walk upon the water and the first to doubt and sink. Peter boldly proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, and yet would prevent Jesus from fulfilling his messianic mission. The rock upon which Jesus will build the church becomes a stumbling block. The man whom tradition names as the first bishop of the church can also represent the adversary. "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus says, "You are a *σκανδαλον*, a stumbling stone to me; for you are not intent upon God's things but human things. If any would follow me, they need to utterly renounce themselves, take up the cross and then follow me."

What is it about being a Christian, a Christ-follower, that requires self-renunciation, a fundamentally new perspective on the world and a transformed way of living? Why, when we come to the font for Baptism, before we turn to Christ and say 'Yes' to God, we first renounce the powers that defy God? We die to the self-centered, old Adam, and we are drowned in the baptism waters. For this is the reason Paul writes:

I appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, because of God's mercy and grace, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, offer and dedicate your whole lives to God. This is true worship! Do not be conforming to this world, its assumptions and allegiances, but be transformed by the *renewing* of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and pleasing, complete and whole.

To follow Christ means *transformed living*. It is not enough merely to admire Jesus, to have warm feelings about him. Being a Christian means even more than professing Jesus as the Christ. It means following in the Way of Jesus, the way of dying and new life. It means living transformed. In Romans 12, Paul gives us a picture of this new life in Christ. In and through holy baptism we are made members of the body of Christ. Though we are many, different and varied, we are made one body in Christ Jesus. God gives the community that bears Christ's name gifts of grace and faith enough to be the body of Christ in this world—to be ministering, sharing, teaching, encouraging, and showing mercy. This body of Christ, the Church, is where love is genuine. In a more literal translation, here's the picture Paul gives:

The love (*η αγαπη*)—not hypocritical!
Shrinking away in abhorrence from the evil thing!
Being glued to the good thing!
In friendship love (*φιλαδελφια*)—being warm in familial affection (*φιλοστοργη*)!
In the honor—giving each other preference!
In the eagerness—no indolence!
In the spirit—lively and invigorating!
In the Lord—serving!
In the hope—rejoicing!
In the oppression—persevering!
In the prayer—continuing steadfast!
In the needs of the saints—sharing in common!
In the hospitality (the love of strangers)—pursuing!

This is what being Christian, living transformed, shaped by the cross of Christ, and following in the Way of Jesus looks like. It means blessing those who persecute us—being a blessing, not a curse. It means rejoicing with the rejoicing ones and weeping with weeping ones. It means living in harmony, not minding the prideful and exalted things, but associating with lowly things. It means not repaying evil with evil, but taking care, always, to do good, to do right and beautiful things in the presence of all persons, so that the world might see what is good, acceptable and whole. Following Christ means making every effort to live together in peace, never ever taking revenge, for that is not our job, but God's. Instead, according to the Way of Jesus, the way of the cross, we are to provide even for our enemies, even for those who hate us. That's what the "burning coals" is all about. In Christ we will not be conquered by evil, but we will be conquering evil with good!

Conquering evil with good—such is the Way of Jesus. It is *transformed living* in Christ. It is a picture of our life, our life as Christians, our life as the body of Christ in and for this world. Compare this picture of Christian living to the pictures which the world presents us—pictures of revenge and violent retribution, taking care of ourselves and getting even with others. Such are the pictures we see in the news, on the front page. The Way of Jesus is counter-cultural, against the politics of this world. Let's face it, the Way of Jesus is un-American, it's cross-shaped. It says that *transformed living* arises from first dying.

The primary ikon of Christian living, of following Christ, is the cross. Peter couldn't fathom the way of the cross. Peter is the one who daringly declares he is ready to die for Jesus, yet he falls asleep in the hour of prayer, slashes off the ear of the high priest's slave, and three times denies even knowing Jesus. Peter, who runs from the cross, also runs to the tomb, but still can't get it. He is renewed in spirit after he sees the resurrected Jesus, yet it takes an overwhelming dream for Peter finally to "get" that God loves and welcomes even the Gentiles. So, if God calls Peter to the ministry of the church and makes good use of Peter, surely God is calling you and me to follow in the Way of Christ, the way of the cross, the way of *transformed living*. What does following Jesus look like in your life? Is it a picture of transformed living? Is Jesus always the song for your journey?

*Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;
I'll tell ev'rybody about you wherever I go:
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.*

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.