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SERMON: [SLIDES](#)

I have loved diving deep into this book of Esther. What a story!

As I re-read the final chapters of Esther last week I was so dismayed. Yes, this story may have been written to remind the Jewish people living in exile of their identity and heritage, but does it need to end with such retribution and violence?

When will we ever change?

There are so many parts of this story that have echoes in today's world. I find myself wondering what's needed for not just change, but for real transformation to take place.

CHANGE or TRANSFORMATION?

Want to think together. Would love to hear your thoughts

Hold this story in the frame of change and transformation.

What do we mean by change and transformation?

change is the ordinary response to external forces.

Change is important, life giving, necessary. The change of seasons leads to growth - sometimes visible, sometimes harder to see. (IMAGES new growth on pine trees, tree rings, trees)

From one year to the next the tree doesn't look significantly different. In April it looks one way, in July another. Changes can be visible and temporary - the ways we dress (2 images) and what we find attractive.

Change refers to the act of becoming different - it may be temporary, may be situational, may be reversible, often externally motivated - a reaction to the outer world. We see it in how our lives change over time, welcoming new life, saying goodbye to beloved folks like Gladdie.. (IMAGE BABY)

Transformation is different - (IMAGE butterfly). *Transformation* is a fundamental reordering of core beliefs and central assumptions. Often a radical shift in form and identity, lasting. Transformation often is triggered by events in the outer world - like trauma, causing inner, deeper change to happen.

One thing, the caterpillar, turns into something unrecognizably different.

Richard Rohr¹ says transformation requires something old dropping away - there's a letting go, a dying, so something new can be born. *When something is taken away that you've grown used to or addicted to, you will either turn bitter or be transformed.*

This letting go and making room is what makes transformation so hard!

A new way of being, a new belief system can enter only where the old has died away.

¹ [The Difference Between Change and Transformation — Jonathan Merritt](#)

Did anyone listen to the podcast with Fr. Greg Boyle that I linked in the Midweek News?

Interview with Father Greg Boyle²- a Jesuit priest, founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and reentry program in the world.

He talks about transformation of the homies and of himself. A foundational part of their life together. A core belief of Fr. Boyle's is:

There is no us and them, there's only us. (SLIDE)

That's transformation. That's allowing a belief system to die to make room for something new.

(SLIDE) He says...systems change when people change and people change when they're cherished. I see this here all the time, he goes on...***People are transformed because they were shown kindness.***

He explains: ***I used to think if healing is primary here, then people need to be doing therapy, and we have therapy and we have all these classes and groups, but because everybody embraces the spirit of cherishing and acknowledging and welcoming, that's what's compelling...it's a bombardment of cherishing love. It really wins the day.***

A bombardment of cherishing love - it wins the day.

(SLIDE)

Change or transformation.

In our story of Esther - there's lots of change - who's in power, who calls the shots - who wins and who loses. The queen changes (from Vashti to Esther), the king's highest official changes (from Haman to Mordecai). The decree changes from annihilation of the Jews to their being given free reign to exact revenge. Lots of change in this story.

But transformation? That happens when there's love, this cherishing that Fr. Boyle talks about. Esther is transformed. Not all the way, but in ways that require new beliefs and risks. Her circle expands. The US versus THEM becomes an Us - not all people, but all Jewish people. She wakes up to the need and boldly steps out - risking her life as she goes before the king - takes that risk for her people.

Esther's transformation happened because of Mordecai's love - for her and for their people. This cherishing love that Fr. Boyle says "wins the day" - this story reminds us that transformation isn't a straight line of growth, for any of us.

² <https://www.danharris.com/s/10-happier>

As we move toward living a transformed life, we remind each other that each one, Yes, EACH ONE of us is worthy of being cherished.

I am cherished by God. So are you, and you, and you. Full stop.

Esther was cherished, loved, by Mordecai, and so transformed in ways that enabled her to act with boldness.

Unfortunately in this story we don't see this transformative love expanded to all people. There is an US and a THEM in this story - and again we need to remember why and to whom this allegorical tale was written. According to Rachel Held Evans³ the Book of Esther is a story about Jewish identity and heritage; a story about what it means to be Jewish in the context of diaspora. It's a story about God's preservation and providence to a scattered people. Might we say it's about how to live in the midst of overwhelming change?

Paul, writes to the Romans living in a sea of change, 'do not be conformed, but be transformed, by the renewing of your minds (and hearts) in Christ Jesus'.

Transformation is a dying of ideas that keep us in the us versus them mindset, and moving toward there's only us.

We are an imperfect people. Trying, falling short, and trying again.

This work of transformational change is 2 steps forward and 1 or 2 or even 3 steps back. And then we make forward movement again.

I watched the movie 'A complete Unknown' a couple of weeks ago - the story of Bob Dylan's beginnings. There's a great scene where Pete Seeger, the famous folk singer and peace activist, who (according to the movie) played a pivotal role in Dylan's beginnings goes to have a heart to heart talk. Seeger had invited Dylan, when he was relatively unknown, to be a part of the Newport folk festival. Dylan has returned there year after year as his fame has grown.

Pete loves and celebrates the changes Dylan brings to music - the ways he asks us, through his music, to be transformed - to see that we are all connected..

And, at this moment in the movie, Pete's afraid. Afraid that Dylan's changes in style will ruin what he's worked so hard to create at the folk festival.

We're going to watch a clip from that movie. One that speaks to change and the fragility and work of transformation.

It's the morning of July 25, 1965 (almost exactly 60 years ago), the last day of the festival, where Dylan is scheduled to be the closing act. Dylan's style has been changing, moving away from the folk and trying out new, edgier music. Seeger goes into the hotel room, wakes them up, and gives this speech.

WATCH CLIP

³ [Esther Actually: Princess, Whore...or Something More](#)

Change was a comin' - change in music styles. That night Dylan played an electric guitar with a band that was more rock than folk. The story about what happened that night varies - but some, like Seeger, were very upset, doing everything in their power to stop that change. Pete Seeger was certain that transformation was happening, and could only happen according to *his* vision.

I'm not saying that Dylan was transformed - I don't know enough about him. But he sure brought change.

But I love that part about teaspoons and shovels.

Teaspoons - most of us don't have shovels. But we all have teaspoons.

We all have the power to cherish - to love. To let go of our us versus them mindset.

We all can move our little bits of sand, carrying peace, love, kindness - even when others scoff and say there's no way change will happen.

Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed, by the renewing of your minds.

Moving the mountain of sand, one little spoon full at a time.

People like Fr. Boyle - they carry shovels. But he hands out teaspoons to everyone who walks into his life. He reminds us: (SLIDE)

systems change when people change and people change when they're cherished... people are transformed when they are shown kindness.

You have a teaspoon. How will you use it?

I invite you to think for a moment -

Is there some attitude or belief in you that needs to die, to make space for something new to come to life?

What ways have you been transformed - living in ways that cherish all of creation?

Give thanks for those little, maybe unseen acts, that build the kingdom of God here, now.

We learn best when we use our bodies - and so hold those questions, that feeling of how you are participating in the building of the Kingdom, and come forward, take a spoon - there are various sizes, and let's join together in symbolically moving just a tiny bit of sand. Moving from fear and division to making space for God's love to be made manifest in this time and place.

Who knows, you may have been chosen for just such a time as this.