



LUTHERAN  
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

# Pastor's Update

Mike Housholder & Merv Thompson, Editors

925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ April 7, 2006

---

"Grace and Peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

There seems to be a coalescing today around the experience of transformation. To be a Christian, we are learning, is not just to accept certain doctrines or teachings, but rather to have a life-change, to turn around and travel in quite a different path. There are no rigid road maps for where this path will lead, but unless being a disciple of Jesus Christ involves some kind of "metanoia," that is repentance, changing course, our path becomes indistinguishable from the values and priorities of the world.

Transformation is a fascinating concept. What the word implies, of course, is that we have already been formed—in childhood, in adolescence, in teenage years, in young adulthood, in maturing adulthood, we have been formed. Studies show that by the age of 21 or 22 much of who we are has been very clearly defined, formed. But transformation means that our very formation is changed, it is 'transferred, transformed, changed. We are reformed, to use a particular Protestant term, reformed into the image of Christ. The Bible refers to this as being "transformed."

It is enlightening to search for the roots of a such a term, found in the Greek language in the word "metamorphoo," which has given birth to the English word "metamorphosis." Webster's Dictionary elucidates two specific definitions of this word.

1. It is a change in physical form, structure or substance by supernatural means. (Isn't it interesting that the dictionary uses the word "supernatural means" when many prominent theologians today no longer use the word.)
2. Metamorphosis is also a "striking alteration in appearance, character or circumstances."

To summarize the dictionary, it appears as if the English word "transformation" means there is some kind of discernable change in a person's life; a change in physical form, structure, substance, appearance, character or circumstances, brought about by supernatural means.

By the way, the New Testament only contains the word "metamorphoo" four times. The first two are basically identical uses, one found in Matthew 17:2 and the other in Mark 9:2. Both of these interpret the events on the Mount of Transfiguration. We read that as Jesus and his disciples are gathered on the mountaintop, suddenly Jesus is

metamorphousthai," which is translated transfigured.

Before the very eyes of the disciples, the human appearance, form, substance of Jesus is transfigured, that is, his face is as bright as the sun, and his clothes become as white as the light. In essence, Jesus is changed into a heavenly being. Of course later events would suggest this is a foretaste of what will also happen to his followers, they will be metamorphoo into heavenly beings, when their lowly bodies will become like his glorious body. Jesus was transfigured, altered in appearance, form and substance.

The third and probably most familiar passage of metamorphoo is in Romans 12:2, where Paul writes that we should not be conformed to this world, but be "metamorphoo" by the renewal of our minds, so that we might prove the will of God. Here most translations of the Bible use the word "transformed." We shall be transformed by the renewal of our minds, we shall experience this metamorphosis. It doesn't appear in this usage that there is any alteration in appearance or structure, but there could be. What it seems to suggest is more a change in character or circumstances. Once again it is clear that transformation is a God-thing, brought about by supernatural means, not something we have generated.

The final use of the word "metamorphoo" is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where it reads, *All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us into his very likeness, in an ever greater degree of glory.* The English translation here is usually "transformed." We are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Here may be indeed a discernable change in physical form, structure, substance, appearance, as well as a very obvious shift in character and circumstances, all brought about by supernatural means. God in his Spirit is transforming us so that we will become more like him, which brings dynamic and dramatic change in our lives.

Transformation language primarily asserts that all of life is being changed, converted, and realigned. It is similar to the passage in John 3 where Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born-again," or "born-from-above." This also involves a change in appearance as well as substance,

character and circumstances.

Lutherans have often been uncomfortable with born-again language. "Living out our baptism" sounds more theologically correct. I remember attending a seminar led by Martin Marty, the renowned Lutheran historian and theologian where someone asked him this very question, "Dr. Marty, Do we need to be born again? Do we need to be transformed?"

Marty answered, "From a Lutheran theological perspective, he said, the best answer is that each of us must be born again, and again and again and again and again and again." Martin Luther made it clear that every day we must die to ourselves and rise to God. There are many implications in Marty's words, but he is asserting that Christian life is about transformation, again and again, transformed in character and substance and circumstances, all by divine power.

This led the Apostle Paul to write in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, the old has passed away, the new has come.* That sounds like metamorphoo to me, metamorphosis, a transformed substance, appearance, character and circumstances.

What does it mean to be transformed by the renewal of our minds and by the power of the Holy Spirit? Such metamorphoo is holistic, it involves the entire person; body, mind and spirit, growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ. The language always implies intimacy, it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. Transformation is not a cookie cutter experience, it takes place in a wide variety of ways and for most of us, over a lifetime. We must be born again and again and again.

Lutheran Church of Hope is rooted and grounded in transformation. Not only has the congregation been transformed again and again and again and again, but "metamorphoo" is in the very DNA of our life together. There is a proclamation, an expectation, a challenge given to everyone to live the "transformed life," to not be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewal of our minds, and also to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. Have you experienced metamorphosis? Just look around and you will find it.

Many have sensed this climate of metamorphosis before even entering the worship space. They saw it in the faces of the welcomers, in the preparatory music, they felt the energy in the building and in the people. Unknown to them, but yet not unknown was the sense that

people had already been praying for them, praying for transformation, hoping to share the everlasting love of Jesus Christ with them. This is not a common experience in many churches, there seems to be walls and divisions and off-putting architecture or music or climate, but Hope has a transformational DNA. I am never quite sure whether overflowing the overflow areas at Sunday worship is welcoming or just the opposite, but we are working on that.

Probably the most transformational experience at Hope is worship. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit permeates all 495 worship services each weekend, and creates this passion and proclivity toward change. For some it is in the music, for some in Sacraments, for some in fellowship, for some in the welcoming spirit, for some it is in the images on the screen or the faith stories, and as many have mentioned, "it seems as if Pastor Mike is speaking just to them." When a membership of 6000 has average worship attendance of 4800 or so each weekend, something transformational is happening.

Finally, transformation is featured in so many of our ministries. Mission trips around the globe to help people in need produce incredible transformation in the lives of the servers. Support groups herald transformation, from AA to Christ life to Divorce Care to Narcotics Anonymous are all about changing lives. Ministries for men and women and youth focus on transforming character, circumstances, and substance. Alpha provides huge momentum for transformation. Small groups, prayer teams, Bible studies, and leadership development all provide paths for metamorphoo.

Are you in a rut? Life seems to be bogged down? Remember that the Gospel is all about transformation, metamorphosis. Jesus says that we cannot put the new wine of the gospel into old wineskins, so let the power of the Spirit transform you, and let the new wine age in new skins. Let there be a striking alteration in appearance, character, substance, and circumstances, all by supernatural means.