

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit

At this time of year, transformation is high on the agenda for some people. Having eaten and drunk too much over Christmas and New Year, we wish to transform our bodies into that of a Greek Adonis. Well that may be taking it a bit too far but you get the gist of what I am saying!

I'd like to talk about Spiritual transformation this morning, not trying to transform the way we look, although in a way, we will 'look' different to those who know us well, when there is spiritual transformation. I would like to share this morning a bit of my transformation too.

One image that has remained with me from my Ordination retreat is the picture +Bob showed us of a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. It is a wonderful picture of transformation. A caterpillar suddenly stops eating and hangs from a branch and surrounds itself in what we call a cocoon. To the outside world nothing is happening, but inside great amounts of energy are being used to prepare the caterpillar for the next part of its journey. The caterpillar digests itself but some of the cells survive and this soup inside the chrysalis turns into eyes, wings and antennae. When all of this is done it fights its way out into the wide world as a beautiful butterfly. It is a hard fight but worth it. Hold that image for now.

Another transformation was that of St Paul. We all perhaps know well or less the story of how Saul (later to be known as Paul) was brought to his knees on his way to Damascus. He was blinded by a great light and a voice was heard to say "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?". This is

the beginning of the story of Paul emerging from the cocoon to become an instrument for God's purposes.

My own transformation, like all of us here today is an ongoing project of God's. Each one of us, young, old or middling are an ongoing project. My own transformation took me on a long and winding journey. I turned my back on Christ as a young adult and embraced Islam. I moved to West Malaysia in the mid eighties and I'd not return to the UK until January 2007. I was a practising Muslim and I bought up all my children as Muslims, taught them to pray, to fast and to read the Qur'an. I was seeped in the culture of my husband's family and have to this day a deep understanding of the Muslim faith and culture. As my marriage began to break down, I started to ask questions, and eventually I moved back to the UK. It is here that I begin to emerge from my cocoon. Slowly but surely God revealed himself to me, the moment I call my Damascus moment and my journey to be with you here today began.

Last week we listened to Nigel preach on the reading of Jesus' baptism. For those of us here who have been baptised this is the moment when we die to our old life and we are pulled through the water to a new life in Christ - this is our moment of the beginning of our transformation, the beginning of our struggle to come out of the cocoon; to become more Christ-like. Some of us, maybe most of us were baptised as babies. I was too but it is I believe that the work of the Holy Spirit at that moment when we are dashed with water and the Minister says, in the name of God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, as babies we too began to emerge from a cocoon. Some of us stay in that cocoon for a long time as we take

journeys through our life, journey's that take us to many places, some that are very far from God. Others are more constant and steady in their journey. Others emerge almost instantly from the cocoon into the light of Christ. For each person it is different & there is no right or wrong way, it just is.

So what does a transformed life look like. It enhances the life of others. In the reading from Matthew's gospel this morning, Jesus calls us to be salt & light. Salt is to us a very ordinary everyday substance; we use it everyday in our cooking. It is though, a small thing of great value even today. In Jesus' time it was a very precious resource. It was used in sacrifice in the ancient world, a sign of it's extraordinary status; it was used as a preservative too but Jesus' use of this metaphor was for the mineral's savoury function. Salt enhances a dish that would otherwise be bland without it. Salt enhances already existing flavours; it makes them themselves, only more so - and we as a community here at St David's must do the same. Each of us bring our own flavour to this family here and we can enhance other flavours, enliven other tastes, making our family more savoury, more delicious more beautiful. Each of us is called by God's grace and each of us, by God's grace bring different gifts.

A transformed life gives life to others. Without light there is no life on earth. Light is part of the equation of life. Light is bright & distinct and allows us to find our way. We as disciples of Christ are called to be distinct if we are going to offer anything to the world. If we allow the gospel to make a difference in our lives we can then, in Tuen make a difference to and for others. Our light must not blind or dazzle people.

We don't look into a light to judge how well it is working, but we look to see how much is illumined by the light to know how effective the light is. We too should illumine our surroundings and the path to Jesus for others.

The health warning, and there's always a health warning, though is too much salt can ruin a meal. Paul warns us in the reading we heard from Romans, not to think too highly of ourselves. We each have our own function, but we are all a part of the body of Christ. Our gifts differ according to the grace given us. Our first calling as Christians is to be he person God has called us to be in our Baptism. Our first and foremost calling is to give glory to God and that requires nothing more than being who we really are; salt & light. As we emerge from our own cocoon, and this may take years and years, but that is fine. So as we emerge our spiritual self emerges. We are not meant to be in the cocoon, just as the butterfly is not meant to be in a cocoon. The beauty of the butterfly is only evident once it is released from the cage of the cocoon just as the beauty that is each and everyone of us here today is revealed once we leave the old ways behind and rise to a new life in Christ using the gifts God has bestowed on each of us.

I want to read a very short story to you from a sermon given by Samuel Wells, Vicar at St Martin in the Field in London.

Once there was a rich man. He met and fell in love with a young maiden. She was lovely in form and lovelier still in character. He rejoiced when he saw her. Yet he grieved too. For he knew that he was not like her. His

face was hideous and his heart was cruel. He considered how he could win her hand.

Eventually he hit upon an idea. He went to see a mask maker. He said 'make me a mask that I shall become handsome. The perhaps, I may win the love of this noble young woman. ' The mask maker did as he was bid. The man was transformed into a handsome figure. He tried hard to summon a character to match. It was sufficient to win the heart and the hand of the fair maiden, and they were married. Ten years of increasing happiness followed. Bu the man knew he was carrying a secret. He sensed that true love could not be founded on deceit. He had to know if his wife really loved him, if she loved the man behind the mask. So one day, with a heavy heart and trembling hand, he knocked a second time on the mask maker's door. 'It is time to remove the mask,' he said. He walked slowly & anxiously back to his home. He greeted his wife.

To his astonishment, she made no comment, nor showed any untoward reaction. There was no scream, no horror, no revulsion. He searched for a mirror. He looked - and saw no ugliness but a face as handsome as the mask, a face so different from his original face. He was amazed and overjoyed - but bewildered and confused. He ran back to the mask maker to seek some kind of explanation. The mask maker said, 'You have changed. You loved a beautiful person. You have become beautiful too. You have become beautiful through loving her. You become like the face of the one whom you love.'

Are you hiding behind a mask, in a cocoon afraid to emerge? Are you a half in half out of the cocoon sort of person? In the cocoon it is about doing more but once you fly free of the cocoon it is about being more like Christ. Know that the Spirit of God will whisper to us along the way and He will reaffirm that if we are willing to emerge as a beautiful butterfly He will be with us: learn to fly free to be free to grow into the people God has called us to be.