

Transluce>Transform>Transcend!

John 3:1-17, Romans 2:2

(6 helium balloons—2 purple(Lent), 2 green(life), 2 white(hope), are floating above a nearby pedestal. They are secured by a weight)

Although there are multiple threats to a renewal of hope in humanity's fortunes today, I believe that millions of people around the earth are seeking renewal—and even spiritual renewal!— within the scope of their lives.

Even as spreading disease, political tyranny and economic inequality haunt our existence, I still believe we are living in a time of hopeful rebirth.

Maybe it is because we **are aware** that we live in a time of rebirth and renaissance that we **know** it is a fragile and uncertain moment.

We are aware there is a rebirth in knowledge!—

—Yet we also see how **resistance to knowledge** casts a dark shadow across the horizon of humanity's future.

We are aware there is a new birth in science!

In communications!

In art!

Even in religion!

But we also see the clear and present danger in **science denial**— in harmful manipulation of the internet—in bad religion hiding an agenda to control people's lives and decisions.

And art is always in danger of being under valued! Recently, I was creating a budget for an arts grant opportunity, and was cautioned by

one funder not to calculate artists' compensation line items above minimum wage.

Why?—when art creates meaning and reinforces our minds and hearts against powers that try to make us feel as though we are meaningless.

We live in a time when tender, green shoots of hope are poking through the surface of global human experience—yet are threatened by an early frost of despair and cynicism.

I wonder if a certain word-prefix that we are all familiar with is a kind of literary symbol of this renewal we experience and wish to sustain.

`The prefix is TRANS.....TRANS!

TRANS__PLANT—a stem cell **trans__plant** signals hope for renewed life against the hopelessness of failed organs or body systems.

TRANS__LATE—offers to people who cannot understand each other's language—**a sincere hope** of mutual understanding in place of mutual mistrust and miscommunication.

TRANS__GENDER—embraces the hope that while gender matters, and matters deeply— gender ought not be a deterministic barrier to human diversity, human opportunity and a human being's right to create their own identity in the course of their own life.

TRANS__CULTURAL—the hope that we can see ourselves in the mirror of another person's culture, and that we can see another person's culture in the mirror of our own—as opposed to dangerous cultural wars in which cultures try to dominate and even extinguish other cultures.

TRANS__LUCENT—Like many windows in this building— Let light through! Let light shine through windows, human relations, human minds, let light shine into and through your own life.

TRANS__PARENCY—honesty and striving for truth in an era threatened by fake news, persistent lying, and doubts about whether there is any such thing as truth or facts.

TRANS__CEND—the main reason to learn to know and love God, whose Higher Power not only helps us to cope with adverse circumstances, but see an upward path by which we may rise above them.

The fact that the apostle Paul wrote these memorable message—“Be **trans formed** through the renewal of your mind.”—tells me that Paul lived in a time like ours when hope wrestles with despair —inside the heart of nearly every human being.

Transformational thinking is demanded in most people’s lives today as institutions must **be transformed** to serve people and planet.

Employees, workers, managers, entrepreneurs are all challenged to transform our thinking about our mission, how we work, create and plan.

Presidential election campaigns, like the one we are now in, provide a creative forum every four years for proposals of **transformational ideas** on every subject that concerns **us**—the public— whether it is how **be transformed** to provide everyone with affordable health care or how to prevent calamitous climate change, or create affordable child care so families aren’t burdened with what amounts to a second mortgage payment to take care of our children.

Transformational thinking—that is—developing a higher consciousness in human affairs—is the renewal of our minds which helps us to create better ways to do things.

A funny, tongue in cheek television ad that's running now illustrates this need. In the ad, a time is imagined in the long ago past when, in the face of drought and crop failures, some ancient peoples would sacrifice a human life in order to satisfy the gods and bring rain. It's horrible to think of, yet it did happen. People thought some angry god was punishing them with a drought and that they had to appease that god.

In this ad, a man walks to the edge of a volcano where he is to be sacrificed.

“What's the plan?” he says to the two men waiting there.

“You jump in there. The drought ends. The crops start growing. Everybody is happy.”

“Yeah, right.” replies the intended victim. “What if, instead, we built some system that would get the water out of the river—and into the fields—like with tubes or something?”

“A gravity driven water distribution network?” replies one of the men accompanying him to the edge.

“Yes! Yes!” replies the man about to be sacrificed, now greatly relieved he's been understood.

“Have you got one here?”

“No.” he says sadly.

In the distance, we hear grumbles from a crowd that has gathered to watch the spectacle and be satisfied that their drought will soon end.

“Go on , get on with it.” shouts one of them.

“Well, in you go!” says one man.

“I guess you’re right.” says the says the sacrificial victim. He happily jumps into the volcano. The remaining men hold out their hands to see if it’s started raining yet.

And then we hear the voice of Ellen Degeneres, “Eventually, everyone realizes, ‘There’s a better way to do things.’

Namely—Transformational thinking!— that helps us transcend heretofore impossible, painful conditions of living.

In the spiritual realm, **being transformed by the renewal of your mind** means seeking a higher consciousness.

In other words, begin to develop a God consciousness!

Meaning!— Take the One Whose Beauty and Love as your measure in daily living.

Let the Creative Mystery help you navigate the uncertain adventures you are now on.

To do this requires an intention on your part to go beyond the mindset which you now have.

Go beyond the consciousness which you now have.

There is a better way!

How do you find it? You start surrendering your will to God by asking:

How is God speaking with me today?
Where!— and to whom!— is God sending me today?

A woman here in Kansas City has taken this idea to heart. As part of *KC Mothers In Charge*'s door to door effort, "Why Are We So Angry?" Rosilyn Temple has been talking with people about violence and rage. She also shows up at the scene of homicides to talk with victims' families and police.

Her spark? In 2011, her 26-year-old son, Antonio Thompson, was shot and killed in Kansas City. It took years to recover from the loss, she said, *but "I surrendered my life to God (and) he renewed my mind."*

Sound familiar?

And we still hear a compelling voice: **"Be transformed by the renewal of your mind."**

An intriguing mini drama in the Gospel of John will carry us to a deeper level before we conclude.

Nicodemus, whom the Gospel of John names a leader among the Jewish people of Jesus' time—went to speak with Jesus at night.

The traditional interpretation of this episode is that Nicodemus went to Jesus under cover of darkness in order to avoid recognition. Here is an educated scholar of the Torah and the prophets, a respectable Pharisee—going to hear what amounts to a street preacher.

What would people say?
He must go at night.

Okay.....Maybe so.....Maybe not.

Here's another another possible take!

The Jewish Sabbath starts at sundown on Friday night.
 Shabbat is an evening service.
 It begins after you can see three stars in the sky.

So if Jesus wanted to speak with people about spiritual matters, it would make sense that he would be out and about on Friday night.

And if Nicodemus wanted to have a one-on-one with Jesus, he could count on finding him out and about on a Friday night. Nothing secretive about this encounter. It was the best time to have a sit down with the increasingly popular street preacher.

Then too, it's a bold move by Nicodemus! Most of us would not venture out into the streets of a people radically different from ourselves—at night!—to try to understand what God might be saying and what God might be doing today.

And sure enough, Jesus challenges him right away telling him he has to be born again of the Spirit...from above.

Go beyond the mind you have, Nicodemus!

Become transcendent!—Translucent!—Reborn!—Transformed!

—by the renewal of your mind!

I think that is the message for us today as well.

Lent is a time of repentance and renewal. Go beyond the mind you have!

Let the Light of the Living God!—

—Inside your mind!—to work within you to renew your spiritual life.

What does your life want to become?

What does God want your life to become?

What you want!—surrendered to **what God want!**— makes for a powerful, transformative mix.

My conclusion is an invitation to each of you to focus on something you want to transcend in your own life. **(go to the 6 helium balloons floating above the pedestal)**

Some transformation you are fiercely seeking!

During the next two months of Lent, then Easter and Easter tide, we are going to release some balloons.

We are going to start today by releasing our personal prayers to **be transformed** (release a balloon)—

By the **renewal** (release a 2nd balloon)—

Of our minds (release a 3rd balloon).

God...I **surrender** (4th balloon)

My will to You! (5th balloon)

I am ready to listen to the message of Jesus:

You must be born from above!

(release 6th balloon)

Rev. Scott Myers

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Westport Presbyterian Church