

With these two texts then in mind, this sermon is for anyone who ever wished they could change their life and become someone else; to change or amend their life in such a way that one day it would seem as though the old life, the former life, was someone else's life, and someone else's identity. This is for anyone who ever wished they could reinvent themselves; yet, at the same time knew that – though the past was the past – it would always be unmistakably part of your past. Reinvention was something you could try to do; and in which perhaps you might even succeed. But *transformation* was something else. It is something that happens only by the transformative power of a gospel we call Grace.

Now, you may recall last Sunday we read the story from the New Testament book of *Acts*, about Philip and a strange fellow, the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The latter was a high court official, successful enough to have his own chariot to go off and spend his vacation traveling to Jerusalem and back, to worship an unknown God in a foreign temple. Philip, a recent Christian convert, is sent by the Spirit to encounter this fellow on the so-called “wilderness road,” somewhere between the city and Gaza. There he finds him lounging at a rest stop trying to read a passage from the Jewish scriptures (Isaiah's messianic image of the sacrificial lamb of God), but understanding none of it.

Philip interprets the passage for him by proclaiming the good news of God in the risen Christ, the Messiah; and, as a result, this eunuch (i.e., one with no real future of his own) is given a new identity and a new life. He hears the gospel of Christ preached; and in response, asks what could possibly prevent him from being initiated into this new found faith? Suddenly finding water in the wilderness, he's baptized then and there. A changed man, he heads off down a road that once was only wilderness, never to be heard from again; but this time, Luke tells us, he “goes on his way rejoicing.”

For all his curiosity and inquiry, did this stranger discover for himself a way to become something he was not before? Did he re-invent himself, becoming someone else? Or instead, was it only in an *encounter with that which he sought* – enabled by one who had good news to tell, and who himself had been empowered by something (namely, Spirit) beyond himself – that led the one who was only a wandering stranger with no future of his own to become something else, someone other, someone more than he could have ever asked for, inquired of, or imagined himself to be?

Was it reinvention or transformation? Was it someone making a life for themselves, where there wasn't much of a life before? Or was there something more to it? Was it the transformative power of the gospel of unconditional, unmerited, amazing grace?

Was it reinvention or transformation? Was it someone making a life for themselves, where there wasn't much of a life before? Or was there something more to it? Was it the transformative power of the gospel of unconditional, unmerited, amazing grace?

In a shopping center in South Minneapolis some people travel there for bargain prices. But others, who are illegal aliens, come to the parking lot to buy false green cards, passports and Social Security numbers from various dealers who stash them in the trunks of their cars.

Six years ago, a woman named Erika had herself once been hidden in a car trunk when she was five months pregnant, and on the last leg of a long journey. Erika is now a single mother from Mexico. As she put it in a story recorded for NPR's *Marketplace* recently, “I didn't see a future in Mexico because in my culture, single moms are looked down upon. I wouldn't have been able to support my son financially either.” As the storyteller puts it,

The first two times she tried to cross into the U.S. she went by foot. She was led by hired guides known as “coyotes”. Both times she was caught and sent back to Mexico. Then she found the professional smugglers and their sophisticated operation. When she entered the ID factory she was just another poor, small-town girl looking to get out. But when she emerged, she appeared to be a wealthy Mexican government official. She had the look, the clothes, even the legal documents to prove it. Instead of the usual coyote leading her through the desert, this one was dressed as a cab driver. He was supposedly driving Erika around on a shopping trip in the US.

But, people like Erika can't fully escape these networks, even here in Minnesota. Soon Erika's fake green card will “expire”. She'll have to come to a spot like this parking lot to buy a new one. She leads a normal life here in the US. She has a job, pays taxes and her son is in school. She hates dealing with the ID merchants. She says it makes her feel like a criminal. But to keep the life she's built for her son and herself, she says she has no other choice.

“When time goes by, you realize that an illegal document is just that,” she says, “and what matters is what you make of your life because there's a lot of illegal people and the illegal person who does real crime pays for it. But if you're good, then life should be good, no matter where you are.”

Erika's story is not an uncommon American story. In many ways, it is another example of American re-invention, not unlike those enumerated recently on a radio broadcast of *Talk of the Nation*.

A British earl, Christopher Buckingham, it turns out, is really a Florida man named Charlie Stopford. For twenty years he took on Lord Buckingham's identity until he was caught last year in Alabama.

Frank Abagnale, the con artist who once masqueraded as a Pan Am pilot and wrote *Catch Me If You Can*, has said becoming somebody else isn't all that hard.

Dr. Robert Madrid offered himself as an expert court witness after he moved to Anniston, Alabama, in 2002. His credentials included degrees from Harvard Medical School and MIT, membership in Mensa. It turns out he was also a complete fraud. An investigation earlier this year revealed that almost nothing on Madrid's resume was true, not the degrees, not the history, not even his birthday. Even his name can't be confirmed. Madrid invented it all to shed his past and become somebody else.

Stories like that always sound surprising, but they're also an essential part of the American story. Take John Paul, a hotheaded Scots ship captain who changed his name, fled to America, and as John Paul Jones became a Revolutionary War hero, revered as the founder of the United States Navy. Benjamin Franklin was apprentice to his brother when he was fifteen, but broke the law and ran from Boston to Philadelphia and a new life. The apparently limitless frontier offered the temptation of individual reinvention: second, third or fourth chances to pick up, move, and start fresh. Immigrants could forget or change their ethnic or religious backgrounds, businessmen get out from under bankruptcy, and criminals flee their records.

A History professor, Steven Bullock observes, “I think it's particularly American because it's built into so much of our American culture. ... Tom Paine, the great revolutionary pamphleteer talked about the ability to start the world again. To just begin, start right from the beginning. A religious tradition, in early America was based around a Protestant view of a new birth, where you would literally become someone

different. Our economic culture of the free market, is that nothing is to remain the same ... Our ideal of ... the self-made man, Benjamin Franklin, who starts off in poverty and obscurity and ends up becoming this world famous figure. It's, you know, it's something which is just about any where you look in American culture, there's this idea of being able to become something new. So the breadth of the nation allows people to become different.”

Then there's this fascinating story a caller tells of himself when he phones into the talk show:

In '75, when I was fifteen, I came across a birth certificate of a cousin that was born a year before I was, and who had died when he was about six months old. And I was in the process of getting my own driver's license and birth certificate and kind of as a lark I got one under that name as well, Social Security card and a driver's license. And I had used it a little bit when I was younger. When I was a teenager I worked part time jobs under that name. I'd pull that driver's license out. I've never actually lived under it, but I've kept it active all those years. ... I have to renew the driver's license every few years. And I've worked a part-time job anywhere from two weeks to one time nearly a year under that name and paid taxes and everything. ... Now it feels like a security blanket. I'm in my forties. I guess later on, I had this feeling if something went wrong with my life, I could always drop it and go to this one.

Amazing.

So, let's see: There's fake identification. There's reinvention. There's even *dual* citizenship. Literally! Now, instead of all this re-invention of one sort or another, how about *transformation*? For, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Here's what occurs to me:

Everyone lives a life and -- in so doing -- knowingly or unknowingly shapes a life for themselves. They become who they are, sometimes by choice, or other times by certain circumstances beyond their choosing. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes a bad choice, or unwelcome circumstance leads one to conclude, “I want to be someone else. I want to re-invent myself, my life, change my circumstances, start over, make a fresh start.” So one sneaks across a border, or assumes another identity, or tries living in someone else's skin for a while. In some ways, one might say it's all *very American*. It's also *very human*.

But long before we individually forged these brave new worlds for ourselves, before all this re-invention, there was, of course, *in-vention*; when were created to be who we were created to be. And, as a result of that, there is this longing -- sometimes just a hidden, secret whisper of a longing -- to be, or become, something or someone we know deep down to be who we already are as a child of God and God's greatest delight and deepest love.

And then, in all our seeking and longing for a second chance, we are met along a road that once was only wilderness. Far beyond our longing for the chance to make a fresh start -- beyond our desiring, and certainly our deserving -- there is the encounter and the gift of something as elusive as it is convicting, that we simply call Spirit, which tells us the best of *good news*:

We are the stuff of *divine invention*. We are made up of the stuff of a kind of love by which “he has loved us.” Not only that, we are a part of a divine *intention*, by which the deadness of the past is left to the past; so that – by the transformative power of God's grace -- we might ourselves become the imperative to love, “as Christ has loved us.” That we might “abide” in such love.” And our “joy may be complete.”

Amen. *jb+*

A letter from a parish youth:

To my friends at St. Johns,

I would like to let you know that I have registered for the AIDS Walk in San Francisco on July 16th, and am very excited about the event. This is a very important issue to me so I have set an ambitious fundraising goal. I want to do as much as I can to make a difference in the lives of men, women, and children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Even though there has been a lot of publicity about drug treatments which are prolonging some people's lives, they don't work for everyone, and there is still no cure in sight. Moreover, young people are still getting infected at alarmingly high rates.

I need your help. Will you please consider sponsoring me for the AIDS Walk? Just click on the website address below to enter my personalized web page where you can easily make your online donation. I will also be at church this Sunday to ask for support, if you can sign up to help that way. Thank you, in advance, for your help.

To visit my personal web page and sign up to sponsor me just paste in: <http://aidswalksanfrancisco2006.kintera.org/faf/r.asp?t=4&i=165792&u=165792-127362989&e=616255295>

Thanks so much,

Sophie Rossoni



SAINTS & ANGELS OF THE WEEK!

From time to time we remember those who ascend slightly above, to hover for a while and buff their halos. This week we thank some of our parish leadership and members who have worked so hard in recent weeks to keep Saint John's a safe and joyous place for parish members and friends to gather for Christ-like love and fellowship on Sunday mornings, including: Marianne Crosby, Nathan Limpus, Corky Francis, Andre Gensburger, Larry Case, Tom and Jane Rossoni. Thank you, all!

Election Day Coffee Hosts are needed. Can you help? June 6th there'll be three voting precincts in the parish hall, with parish members serving as clerks in our adopt-a-poll fundraising project. We like to serve complimentary coffee to our neighbors/visitors who stream through throughout the day. If you're available for a shift, just to offer a cup and a “Hello,” please notify the church office, and you'll be

WEEKLY CALENDAR

SUNDAY – May 28th

8:00 am - Holy Eucharist I
8:00 am - Youth Confirmation *weekend continues*

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MONDAY - May 29th - Memorial Day

Church Office closed

TUESDAY - May 30th

7:00 pm - Evening Prayers
8:00 am - Morning Prayers
7:30 pm - Men's A.A. Group

WEDNESDAY – May 31st

7:00 pm - Evening Prayers
7:00 pm - Canto Bello Handbells

THURSDAY – June 1st

8:00 am - Morning Prayers

FRIDAY - June 2nd

7:30 pm - Narcotics Anonymous

SATURDAY - June 3rd

8:00 am - Morning Prayers
8:00 am - 1/2-Day Work Day
8:30 am - Altar Guild
11:00 am - Baptism rehearsal

PARISH WEEKLY PRAYER LIST

Please enter or re-enter any special prayers of petition, intercession or thanksgiving in the PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE intercessory book on the lectern near the double doors of the sanctuary. The intercessor will include them in Sunday worship; they will also be remembered in parish daily prayers throughout the week by those leading daily Prayer services. (More weekday volunteers needed once per month; inquire with the Rector.) Requests normally remain on the prayer list one or two weeks in most categories unless notified otherwise.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ILL AND/OR RECOVERING [(name) = parish members with request]: *Week of May 21st:* Kristy (Kathy Rosen), Betty McCauley (McCauley family), *Week of May 14th:* Charlene Bayles, Patrick Sheehy (John & Germaine Bennison), Clement (Naomi Chamberlain), Evelyn Murray, Janice Walsh, Dave Brauer (Jackie Waterson), Tom Tuohey (Tuohey's), Karly (Samantha Tuohey), *Week of May 7th:* Beth Ferrnre, Anne Mahler, *Week of April 30th:* Wendy Conte, Nancy Spellman, *Week of April 23rd:* Kathie Alcorn (Cyndie Harris), Gini Doty (Doty), Mark, Kathleen (Jackie Waterson), *Week of April 16th:* Jill Evans, Kim Toler, Aunt Barbara (Lori & Jack Ray), Annie & Cody Peterson *Week of April 9th:* Harry Bowers (John Bennison).. *And for all families, friends and all who care for them or abide with them.*

FOR THOSE IN LONG-TERM NEED & CARE, ESPECIALLY: Ruth Ann Yates (Ernie & Mary), Rachel Bridges, Eli, Sherri Tennant (Michelle Smith), George (Barbara Fogerson), Ruth Ann Nolan (Jack & Lori Ray), Jim Cole, Katelyn Grubich (Nathan & Rhiana), Rachel Bridges, Joseph (Suzanne Howard), Chris Bancroft (Carole Mason), David and family, Diane Mahler (Dick & Beryl), Patrice Zettner (Suzanne Howard), JoAnne Parsonage, Richard Braun, Alpha Litz (Charlene & Kristin Bayles), Eric Batchelder, Tom, Don (Tuohey's), Clint Ingram & Nancy Grainger (Belluomini family), Kyle McWhirter & Doris Lambert (Lori & Jack Ray), Marjorie (Barbara Fogerson), Betty Barnes, Rose Cunningham (Shirley Adams), Cecily, Benny Hidalgo, James Piccolo (Sherrie Hidalgo), June Taylor, Lee Grimm, Nina, John Bloom, Marylye Johnson, Jean Kifer (Grimm family), Art Waterson, Deen Parrish & Jill Beddecarré (Tamara Steiner), Flo Roberts, Suzanne Widmar, Kathy Carr, Virginia Longacre (Marianne Crosby). *And for all families, friends and all who care for them or abide with them.*

FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL OR DYING, ESPECIALLY: Nancy Liechty (Susan & Phil Coulston), Duane Pinkerton, Pat Rogers (Lori & Jack Ray), Baylor (Michelle Smith).

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE DIED: Jacob Kallé.
*Rest eternal grant to him, O Lord,
let light perpetual shine upon him.*

FOR THOSE WHO MOURN: Lena & Family (Barbara Fogerson).

FOR THOSE SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES: Randy Vincent, Josh Hallmark (Limrite's), Mike Ferriera, Kenneth Hougey (Cindy Molander), Matt Rossoni (Rossoni's), Eric Doty, Malin Johnson, Travis Schweizer (Whitehurst); and all others known and unknown to us, their families, and all who suffer and grieve as a result of armed conflict.

FOR OTHER CONCERNS, CARE & SUPPORT: Barbara Johnson (Beverly Price), Joey, Dan, Nickolas Durso (John & Germaine Bennison), Gloria (Naomi Chamberlain), Sarah Mahler-Newton, Justin, Melissa & David Mason (school concerns, Suzanne Howard), Rosslyn, Colette, Nick, Shon & Edrick, Nancy Dinsmore (safe travel / returning to Holy Land), Roseanne (Karen), Foster family (Suzanne Howard), James Fester, Rose Bloom (Grimm family), Andrew (Jackie Waterson), JD Howard (Howard family). *So fill our hearts, O Lord, with your abiding care and love.*

FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY, and all who minister with compassion to the needs of body, mind and spirit. For the relief of pandemic diseases. For all who suffer from natural disaster. For all who suffer from violence, terrorism, and armed conflict. For the safety of humanitarian relief workers. For the eradication of hatred, racism intolerance or injustice in our nation; and ethnic conflicts around the world. For the good earth God has given us, and for the wisdom and will to conserve it. For our enemies. For peacemakers and peacekeepers in the family of nations. For peace in our world. For peace in our lives.

WE REMEMBER & GIVE THANKS FOR OUR SHARED MINISTRY WITH THE DIOCESE OF CALIFORNIA, AND ALL MINISTRIES IN THIS PARISH: For the perpetual renewal and transformation of the vision and mission of our own parish, its growth and nurture, building upon the sure foundation of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For a faithful Eastertide season

IN ANTICIPATION of the birth of a child to all families known to us, including: Christina Caughlan & spouse, Danna & Ted Coleman (June '06 - Grimm's), Lou & Tanya Dwyer (Aug '06 - Carole Mason), Rebecca & Will Campbell (9/06), Jennifer & Rick H. (9/06 - Suzanne Howard), Michelle & Jimmy Campbell (10/06), Ruth & Jesse (11/06 - Case Family).

Confirm their joy & anticipation, O Lord, by a lively sense of your presence with them.

FOR THOSE TO BAPTIZED June 4th: Claire Riley Chislett, Audrey Anastasia Chamberlain.

Let us pray for these persons who are to receive the sacrament of new birth.
FOR THOSE YOUTH CONSIDERING CONFIRMATION June 10th: Nick Murelli, Megan Rosen, Eric Jordan, William Howard, and Josh Case.

Let us pray for these persons who will renew and confirm their baptismal vows.

FOR THOSE CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS: including:

May 30 - Heather Burns, Garrett Evans May 31 - Rachael Smith
June 3 - David McCall, Ryan Powell, Ken Newton

Grant that they may grow in faith, wisdom and grace, all their days.

IN ANTICIPATION of the marriage of: Dan Jordan & Casey Cabarrus.

Look upon this man and woman who seek your blessing that they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make.

AND FOR THOSE CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES: including:

May 29 - Andre & Tiffany Gensburger

June 1 - Peter McNeill & Jennifer Rice

June 2 - Darby & Suzanne Howard

June 3 - Bob & Sharon Burns

Give them wisdom, devotion, forbearance, support, joy & affection, in their life together.

Notice to our parish friends and members: For your privacy, certain portions of our parish website containing personal contact information, etc. is now password-protected for parish members only. To get your password and full access to our site, contact the church by email: info@saintjohnsparish.org.

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L A B E L



NEWSWEEK

A NEWSLETTER OF SAINT JOHN'S PARISH, SUNDAY MAY 28, 2006

NEWS & NOTES

Our preacher this Sunday is our own Fred Fenton. His sermon title is "Up Again, Old Heart!" Fred says, "As we come to the end of Eastertide, my message is about bringing the spirit of Easter into our lives." Don't miss it!

Looking ahead:



"Beat the Summer Heat" 1/2-Work Day property pruning and clean up is set for **Saturday, June 3rd, 8 AM - 11 AM**. Please come pitch in and help for an hour or two. Hot coffee and donuts at 8!

Reminder: Sunday, June 4th is Pentecost. Be sure to wear red!

Canto Bello Handbell "Spring Ring" - including Heartsong, the Bay Area Women's Ensemble set for Sunday afternoon, June 4th, 3:00 PM, Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church. Gourmet dessert reception! Free will donation will support fundraising tour to benefit Isubilo Orphanage in Zambia.

Summer Monthly Book Club had a great kick off last Sunday. Please consider joining us for a fun-filled dinner and discussion. Here's the read:

- June 25th meeting will be hosted by Germaine Bennison. Selection for this month is *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a memoir by Joan Didion, her attempt to make sense of the weeks and months that followed the personal tragedies that "cut loose her ideas about marriage, children, death, illness....about life itself."

- July 23rd meeting will be hosted by Jane Rossoni. July's selection is *The Known World*, a novel by Edward P. Jones. Set in Virginia, 20 years before the Civil War, the primary character is an educated black slave owner. "...complex, beautifully written..." The Sunday evening 6 o'clock events include supper. Just let Jane know prior to the meeting if you can join us!

[Also Summer Book Swap begins June 25th: start clearing your shelves and bring in your used books!]



Calling all graduates! Are you having an important "graduation" in your life (High School, college, special course of study or other significant "passage")? We want to acknowledge and inform the parish of your achievement! Call or email the church to add your name to a list to be published in a coming edition of NEWSWEEK!

REINVENTION OR TRANSFORMATION?

A SERMON PREACHED AT SAINT JOHN'S PARISH MAY 21, 2006

THE REV. JOHN WM. BENNISON, REL.D, RECTOR

Excerpt from the gospel text for the Sixth Sunday of Eastertide:

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything ... And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last ... I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." (John 15:9-17)

Changes. In the midst of the passage from the appointed gospel text today from John about the imperative to love as Christ has loved us – and to make such love manifest and enduring by the way in which we love one another – *something changes*. Or rather, *someone* changes. Those who were once the disciples or "servants" of the master are now regarded as "friends," and in so doing, are given equal status with the One who fully knows God, and "abides" in God. Those who follow Jesus as the Christ are now regarded to be in a radically different relationship; to the extent their identity, the very sense of who they are, or have become, is someone else. It not only changes them and makes them someone different from who they were before; in so doing, it makes their joy "complete."

My reflection on this timely text has brought to mind another, even more redemptive passage for me in recent days. It is from Paul's second letter to the early community of believers in Corinth. It is about those who may have once understood themselves to be who-knows-what, but who now regard themselves as being transformed by the grace-filled love of Christ, as friends of Christ:

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

Forward in Faith ...

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY

May 28, 2006

8:00 AM - Holy Eucharist Rite I
9:00 AM - Youth Confirmation retreat
10:00 AM - Holy Eucharist Rite II,

Celebrant & Preacher
The Rev. Fred Fenton
Sermon: "Up Again, Old Heart!"
Music at 10 o'clock worship
Kim Patterson

Lections for Ascension Day - Year B:
Acts 1:1-11 / Psalm 47

Ephesians 1:15-23 / Mark 16:9-15,19-20
To read in preparation for our worship together.

