

July 19, 2021
Rev. Dr. Jane Florence
Title: My Soul Longs: to be Transformed



Have thy own way, Lord, Have thine own way.
thou art the potter; I am the clay.
mold me and make me after thy will,
while I am waiting yielded and still Jeremiah 18:6

Spirit of the living God. fall afresh on me...
melt me, mold me, fill me, use me...
Spirit of the living God. fall afresh on me ... Acts 11:25

Take my life, and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee...
take my moments and my days
take my will and make it thine.... Rom 12:1 -

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart
.. Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart ,
Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus

Breathe on be breath of God ,
fill me with life anew
that I may love what thou does love
and do what thou would do... John 20:22

Change my heart o God, make it ever true,
change my heart of God, may I be like you ...
You are the potter, I am the clay,
mold me and make me, this is what I pray. Isaiah 64: 8

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary ,
pure and holy, tried and true

It is the cry of my heart to follow you.
it is the cry of my heart to be close to you...
teach me your holy ways, O Lord,
so I can walk in your truth
teach me your holy ways,
and make me holy devoted to you Psalm 25

More like you, Jesus, more like you .
fill my heart with your desire,
to make me more like you

These are words based on scriptures. They convey lessons from our faith tradition that have been set to music. If you are a church go-er, you've probably sung these songs. One of them might even be a favorite of yours that will now be stuck in your head all day. The common thread that weaves through all of them isn't tempo, or key signature, or date of composition. It's the message they share, and there are hundreds more with the same meaning. We could have a hymn fest and sing songs all day and into the night that share this same message of our faith. It is the core message that reminds us we are called to change. Being a follower of Jesus means we want, we expect, we long to be changed.

Melt me, mold me, make me more loving, change my heart, more like you...

Our goal as God's people is to open ourselves and let go of all that would keep us from fully loving.

Our goal as God's people is to allow Creator God to continue our creation, to mold us and teach us, to lead us into a new way of being, to learn a new way of seeing the world, a new way of seeing ourselves and all other. It is the message that permeates the Hebrew scriptures; our poets and prophets call us to change. It is the message that permeates the Christian scriptures.

The first word preached in the gospel of Matthew, comes from John, cousin of Jesus- who says: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" Matthew 3: 2 Now, if you look up 'repent' in a dictionary you'll probably find that it means 'to feel or express sincere regret or remorse' but that is not what it means in our ancient writings. Repentance in scripture is not about feeling bad about yourself, or feeling bad about something you did. It's not about a feeling at all. Repent is an action word. It's about an action. It's about change. Repent means Change direction. Change the way you are going, change the way you see things. Change into a new way of being.

That's what we hear from Jesus. For example: in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes through example after example each beginning with the words, "you've heard it said in the old days... but I say to you today" Jesus is changing the way people are to understand the old laws. Jesus does not abolish the laws, he goes beneath the surface to the heart of them. He says it's not just that thou shall not kill -don't have hatred in your heart. It's not that thou shall not commit adultery -don't live in lust, honor relationships. It's not an eye for an eye revenge; he says don't resist evil with evil, don't return violence with violence. Jesus says it is not about the prescription of old laws, but it's all about what is at the heart. Jesus calls us to a different way of being, seeing and doing. Jesus shows change in every scene; old ways reframed so that the law of compassion rules and changes everything. Images of seeds and weeds, and yeast, and new wine and treasure, and wounds being healed. If it's a story about Jesus, it is all about change.

The Apostle Paul knows change too; he knows it first hand. His life was turned around, inside out and upside down. One minute he was marching off to kill the followers of Jesus, and in the next he was flat on the ground and given new sight to become a follower and a leader in the Jesus movement. Paul writes to the Romans (12: 2) "Do not conform to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your minds." Paul write to the Ephesians, "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ to **grow up** in every way into Christ."

Last week, I asked the question, WHY church? I shared the #1 answer people surveyed give to that question, 81% was to grow closer to God. People come to church, as a way to grow closer to God. The 2nd and 3rd most common responses were very close to each other. 69% come to church so their children will have a moral foundation. 68% say they come to church to become a better person. People come to church so that they (and their children) can grow - can change as we grow- can become a better human being - more kind, more loving, more honest, more caring, generous, joyful! Almost 70% of the people in church, say they are here to change and grow! So we

don't want to keep on the way we've always done it before. We want to be transformed. That's exciting.

The scriptures give us some pretty challenging commandments to live. Love everyone; don't hate. Forgive those who hurt you. Don't retaliate or seek revenge. Don't gossip. Don't judge. Following this path of Jesus is no easy feat. There isn't a magic wand, or a drop of water on our forehead to make it happen instantly. It is the lifetime purpose of our being: to change.

How? That's the question that always follows the why? Why church? to grow closer to God ... to become a better person. How? Change. Change the way we see things.

Richard Alpert was born into a well to do family; his father was a prominent Boston lawyer. Richard received an Masters degree from Wesleyan University at 23, and a Ph.D. from Stanford at 26. He served on the psychology faculties at Stanford and the University of California before becoming a prominent Harvard psychologist at the age of 27. He describes life this way: Our essence, our soul comes to this earth and we get a space suit that allows us to live on this planet. As we grow, people tell us, **nice** suit. As we achieve, people tell us impressive suit. More and more, we identify with our suit. As we learn and explore, others try to get us to wear their suits. We can spend our whole life trying on suits, wearing suits, and coming to believe that we are the suits we wear: good/ bad/ wrinkled/starched. We come to believe that others are the suits we see on them.

In truth, we are not our outward shell. We (our essence, our soul) are loving kindness. All are souls of loving kindness. Beneath the suit we wear, behind the suit that others wear, there is loving kindness. That is the Divine essence of our soul. That is who we are. That is the I AM. That is the soul BEING who can love others when they hurt us. That is the soul being who can forgive others and who can learn not to judge.

Jesus, our Hebrew ancestors, the Apostle Paul's writings encourage us to see with new eyes, to open ourselves for transformation into the sacred images of God-to BE the loving kindness of our true selves and to step back from our false selves so that we can notice our behaviors. We can notice the harsh word, the judgement, and we can reflect on those things. I wonder why my ego saw that in the other person what's that tell about me. I wonder why my ego said that, took offense, got bruised, felt afraid? The 'how' is learning to step back - from my suit, from my ego and connect with my essence of loving kindness, and grow from the experiences into the likeness of Christ.

I am not what you say about me. I am loving kindness. I am not the many mistakes I make; I am loving kindness. You are not that which I see in outward encounters; you are loving kindness.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is asked about the kingdom of God. Jesus replies, "the kingdom of God is within you" (17: 21). In John's gospel, Jesus says, 'you will know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you.' The I AM that connects us all as one is love.

Paul writes of the revelation of the mysteries, of scales falling off eyes, of new sight.. .."may God grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being...that Christ may dwell in your hearts...that you may have the power to comprehend,.. to know the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3: 14-19

Why church? because we desire to grow into the likeness of Christ. Coming to church is a place to learn to see the loving kindness as who we are and who all others are. This is our lifetime purpose and journey that no one dares walk alone. We come together, to encourage, to help one another in this awesome, tremendous , spectacular becoming! Surrounded by the communion of the saints, through the grace of God, that's WHY may it be so.