

The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth. How do we know this? Much of our liturgy in worship today is an embodiment: baptism (cleansing and grafting-grace, forgiveness, covenant, welcome), reception of a new member (reaffirmation of faith, commitment, love and support to journey with others in community), communion (spiritual nourishment and strength- sacrifice, love, mercy, welcome seat at the table for all). Our scripture readings from Acts and Psalms also give us some insight.

Read Acts 10:44-48 and Psalm 98

The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth. Let me put it another way. God changes lives. God doesn't just change seasons and situations; God changes our hearts and minds and souls. God fills us with strength and courage. God grants us wisdom and understanding. God empowers us with hope and peace. God changes lives. How has God changed your life? When was the last time God filled, granted, and empowered you?

The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth.

Let's look first at Acts: While Peter and Cornelius have central roles in this narrative, it is not a story about them. Rather, it is a story about the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit's purposes are accomplished in spite of the boundaries constructed by humans. William Willimon writes, “The real ‘hero’ of this story, the ‘star’ of the drama is not Peter nor Cornelius but the gracious and prodding One who makes bold promises and keeps them, who finds a way even in the midst of human distinctions and partiality between humans.” The Holy Spirit was working a powerful transformation among the early Christians. The Holy Spirit empowered each of them to move from their segregated places. The Holy Spirit broke the barriers between Jew and Gentile. The Holy Spirit propelled the witness of the resurrection beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem and Galilee. William Barclay writes this about this text in Acts, “In Acts there is no trace of one set of people only being able to administer baptism. The great truth in Acts was that it was the Christian Church as a Church which was receiving these converts. It is the Church which is receiving the child on behalf of Jesus Christ. In every baptismal celebration she, the Church, we, the Church, is accepting responsibility for the child brought to the church's fellowship.... And we would do well to remember that the taking upon ourselves of Church membership is not the end of the road but the beginning of the road. There still remains the duty of learning, of penetrating more deeply every day into the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth. Not by our own power, but through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and working powerfully through us. And this is not past tense. This is in every present moment- this breath, and this breath, and this breath. With every breath we take, we are able to experience the victory of our God in our transformation in Spirit and truth.

Let's look now at Psalm 98: **“God has done marvelous things.” “His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory”** says the psalmist. The psalmist is not speaking of a strong fist or even a powerful pitching arm leading to victory, but transformation of the heart and turning away from the old toward what is made new in God. Psalm 98 speaks of the ‘new things’ God is doing. **“Every intervention of God is, however, a new thing for God’s acts of salvation take account of the ever-changing circumstances of earth and its creatures.”**

The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth; in our becoming NEW in Christ. God has the power to transform things from one reality to another: night into day, rock into water, sea into dry land, rivers to blood. More importantly however, what we read about God’s power and God’s victory as revealed to us in Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior, is that Christ came to take away the sin of the world. To sin is to turn away from God. To transform, or be transformed, in God’s power is the act of turning back to God. There is no more important transformation in Spirit and truth than God’s love and grace and mercy cleansing our hearts and forgiving us so that we are defined by God’s love and not sin. This is the greatest victory of our God. This is our greatest victory.

Romans 12:2 reveals to us that Christ came to give us a new way of thinking- not to legalistically follow a set of rules and regulations, but to desire to serve Jesus with all our heart and mind. 2 Corinthians 3:18 reveals, **“All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another (into his likeness with ever-increasing glory); for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”** The Victory of Our God is in our transformation in Spirit and truth.

How has God been the victor in your life? How has God transformed you to be more like Christ? When was the last time God filled, granted, and empowered you?

For Kinkadee Garland, a student at Liberty University, it has been recent. God has been talking to Kinkadee, and Kinkadee to God for quite some time. And where that has led Kinkadee is in joining the active mission and ministries of FPCLY as an official member.

One of the things we recognize in the Presbyterian Church is that one is guided by the Holy Spirit into membership. It is not a simple matter of geography or governance, but an act of God working to fulfill God’s mission and ministry for the church in that time and place.