

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**Reading for Revised Common Lectionary –Pentecost 12
Romans 12.1-8**

**23 August 2020
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Informed, Conformed, Transformed”

In our reading today we heard these words of the Apostle Paul:

Don't conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed....

In our gathering song today, we heard these words:

*Take my mind; inform it. take my heart; transform it. Take my will; conform it
to Yours, to Yours, oh, Lord.*

Inform, conform, and transform:

those are the words that have been on my mind in recent weeks.

And I'd like to tell you 2 short stories about what those words have come to mean in my life.

I was one of those people who absolutely detested wearing a mask.

Wearing a mask went against my basic health beliefs –

that we need to be exposed to germs and bacteria and viruses

in order for our immune system to function properly

& that wearing a mask makes it harder to breathe so your body works harder than normal.

Wearing a mask made me claustrophobic – and a couple of times I had a near panic attack.

But over the last six months I have been INFORMED

by webinars and seminars and articles and videos and countless meetings and conversations,
and now the data is clear:

places in which people wear masks are safer than places in which they don't.

My mind had been INFORMED & still, I resented people telling me that I had to wear a mask.

But if I wanted to go to my dentist, or pick up a Rx at the pharmacy, or go grocery shopping,

I had to wear a mask. It was the rule. My will had been CONFORMED.

And yet, I still had mixed feelings and there was this inner battle that raged inside of me.

The part of me that had been informed had conformed,

but the other part of me resisted and resented and rebelled.

But then I heard an interview of a pastor

who had reopened his congregation for indoor worship in early June.

Despite their precautions, 18 of his members came down with Covid and 3 of them died.

As he told the story he broke down and cried. “I would do anything for a ‘do-over’”, he said.

“I just wish I could go back and make a different decision.”

Then he spoke to those who were listening: “think of your members”, he said,

“and imagine how you and everyone else will feel

if there's a covid outbreak at your church and someone dies.”

All of the sudden I thought of each and every one of you.

And I imagined you testing positive, getting sick, suffering and dying,

and it was then that my heart was TRANSFORMED.

It wasn't just a matter of my head being informed and my will being conformed;

now with my heart being transformed, the battle was over and I was all in.

And here's the second short story.

A number of years ago the Council of churches asked us – a primarily white congregation – to have sacred conversations with Mount Airy – a primarily black congregation.

Their pastor, Anthony Bennett, admitted he was reluctant, saying,

“To be honest we're so tired of talking to white congregations because nothing ever changes.”

He said, “I'm doing this because Rev. Shaw asked me to, but I'll only do it if you get informed.

He gave me some articles to read about things I have never known before,

like black Wall Street for instance.

I read all of the articles and I got informed.

The program was laid out for us and we followed all the steps. We did what was asked of us.

We conformed to everyone's expectations. And we learned a lot.

But there was a backlash in the congregation, and when the resistance came, I backed down.

We did exactly what Pastor Bennett had predicted:

we got informed, we conformed, but we were not transformed.

But it seems that God had a different idea.

I may have failed; we may have failed. But God gave us another chance.

God brought Jeanette Harris and Genesis Gospel Cafe into our lives.

And God brought Pastor Simmonds and New Direction Ministries into our lives.

In working with Pastor Simmonds and Jeanette

and getting to know the people of Genesis and the people of New Direction, something happened inside my heart. It was TRANSFORMED.

No longer could I do nothing, because now it wasn't an issue for people I didn't know;

it was an issue for my friends.

We read the Bible so that our minds can be informed.

We follow God's commands so that our wills can be conformed to what God wants.

But being informed and being conformed it not enough.

The Pharisees were informed and they conformed.

But what Jesus said was that it's not about being informed or conformed –

or at least that's not enough: our hearts must be transformed.

And the thing is, it's that transformation

that changes the work into a passion, and changes the requirements into joy.

Yes, continue to seek to have your minds informed.

Continue to work at having your will conformed.

But most important of all, pray that God will transform your heart

because it's in that transformation that peace and hope and joy are found. **Amen**