

7 MARKS OF TRANSFORMATION
Be Confident in Handling the Word and Sharing the Gospel
Be Welcoming and Hospitable
Acts 2:14-47; Luke 14:12-14

So far, we have looked at five of the “7 Marks of Transformation” as we unpack our 5-year theme of “Be Transformed: Metamorphousthe!” We now focus our attention on the last two marks in that list:

- Be Confident in Handling the Word and Sharing the Gospel
- Be Welcoming and Hospitable

Let us first take a closer look at **“Be Confident in Handling the Word and Sharing the Gospel”**.

Post-Pentecost Peter

Acts 2:14-41 gives the account of probably the first evangelistic rally of the freshly-minted church. Jews “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) who gathered in Jerusalem, had witnessed a strange happening – the followers of Jesus, no more than Galileans, speaking their language. Many were astonished, wondering what this meant, while others dismissed the phenomenon as drunkenness. Seizing the opportunity, Peter “lifted up his voice and addressed them” (Acts 2:14).

Perhaps it may not come as a surprise to see Peter as the first one up. He was after all, a man known to be ever-ready to spring into action, with both positive and negative results. In the local Singlish slang, he may be described as a *chiongster*. Without hesitation, he left his fishing business to become a follower of Christ. He was the one who cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant during Jesus’ arrest. He was the first one out the door running to the tomb when the women returned with news that the stone was removed. He was also the one who denied Jesus not once, but three times. The *chiongster* was reduced to a coward at the moment when it mattered the most.

Yet, as we read on and listen with our eyes, a different Peter emerges. We witness a masterclass in handling the Word and sharing the gospel. He first begins by addressing his audience’s immediate question – were the disciples drunk? He then proceeds to quote relevant scriptural passages and give their interpretation (vv17-36) and gives them a lesson in “Christology” – the study of the person and work of Christ. He also brings in his audience, addressing their responsibility in the death of Christ and points them to Jesus as the resurrected One who now offers forgiveness and redemption. The result? 3,000 new converts were added to their number that day.

How did a brash fisherman now expertly handle the Word and boldly declare salvation in Christ with such eloquence and conviction? How did Peter change from one who denied Christ to one who fully identified with his Lord?

In the three years of being personally discipled by Jesus, Peter and the other disciples would have had many sessions of “scripture studies” with the Living Word Himself. Who knows, Jesus might even have had them memorise and recite scripture, which probably

explains why Peter was able to quote the prophecy from Joel (Joel 2:28-32) and David's psalm (Psalm 16:8-11). By implication, Peter knows the Word well and he is able to share the gospel effectively. Nevertheless, for Peter to be able to quote the right scripture at the right time in the right place for the right reason in the manner that he did – that has to be inspired indeed!

Before His ascension, Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and empower them and that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8). Peter demonstrates this Spirit-inspired and Spirit-empowered witness. To quote Joseph Parker, a 19th century English preacher,

"We have in Peter a standard whereby to measure ourselves. When the Holy Spirit falls upon us we shall go to the Bible with a new reading power, and we shall see wonders where before we saw nothing because of our spiritual blindness."

Empowered, Yet...

In SJSM, we are blessed with many gifted preachers who help us understand biblical truths and how they can be applied in our lives. In addition to the weekly sermons, there is no shortage of Christian Education (CE) courses, such as the "Know the Word" (KTW) series and "How to Read the Bible", which help us "handle the Word" for ourselves. Many of our church members also attend external biblical study courses. These courses equip us with the tools to grasp biblical truths through deeper study of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 are familiar verses reminding us that ALL Scripture is God-breathed and with it, we are complete and equipped for EVERY good work. Paul's charge to Timothy, and to us, is then "to preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:1-2). We have both the Holy Spirit who will empower us and the very word of God we need to feed on. One author describes evangelism as "introducing people to Jesus". There is no reason for us to lack any confidence in handling the Word and sharing the gospel. Yet, how many of us can say that we are confident in handling the Word and sharing the gospel with even one person?

In five years' time, Project Spring-Winter (PSW) will be operational. During the decentralised Church Prayer Gathering (CPG) in November last year, Ps Joshua highlighted PSW as a facility that people will come to in order to have their real needs met. But it will require us, the church, to take the bold and intentional step of sharing the gospel and helping people see their spiritual need as well. He challenged us to prepare ourselves now by building our confidence in sharing the gospel. In his sermon at last year's Covenant Service, he shared we will learn how to do this as a church. Let's look out for this in the weeks and months to come, and commit ourselves to build up confidence to "preach the Word, in season and out of season".

Acts 2:42-47 provides the perfect segue to "**Be Welcoming and Hospitable**". In these few verses, Luke describes the kind of community life the 3,000 began to experience and live out after their conversion. Here, Luke gives us a template for biblical hospitality. There was sharing of possessions and meals, and coming together in prayer and fellowship among all who believed. As a result of this, more people were added to their numbers daily. This almost implies a cyclical link between sharing the gospel and hospitality, therefore creating more opportunities to share the gospel.

Showing hospitality is not only for those who serve at the welcome corner after service, or are good cooks, or have large enough homes, or have extra help at home. Paul names "hospitality" as one of the marks of a true Christian when he writes, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Rom 12:12). The community life of the early church most certainly fits this description. Jesus Himself demonstrated hospitality when He cooked by the shore of the lake and invited His disciples to come and eat.

Cultivate a Hospitable Heart

Hospitality is not about being the "hostess with the mostest" or throwing lavish dinner parties. One writer defines hospitality as "reaching out to those God puts in your path". Showing hospitality may not come naturally to everyone, and we need to pray for God's help to overcome this. Instead, we can cultivate a welcoming and hospitable heart, and get better at it with practice through some practical ways:

- Pray for God to enable you to show His character to others
- Make a list of those you know who may be encouraged by your gesture of hospitality (and these could include the recently bereaved, the lonely or unloved)
- Start small and don't give up if your first attempt did not turn out the way you envisioned
- Learn quick and simple inexpensive recipes!

Jesus highlighted the importance of hospitality when He said, "Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (Matt 10:40). In a nutshell, whoever welcomes a fellow believer, welcomes God. However, we may find difficulty reconciling this with Luke 14:12-14,

"He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

When a Welcome Becomes a Witness

Jesus is not asking us to stop showing hospitality to fellow believers, but to remember to welcome strangers, and not to expect anything in return. The list of people in this passage could very well describe, literally and figuratively, the people who will likely walk through the doors of SJSJ or PSW when it is finally open. Will they find a warm welcome here? In this regard, we still need to be wise and prayerful, especially in uncertain times like these. Without being overly suspicious, ask God to show us those whom He wants us to minister to through our hospitality. However, we also need to remember that in welcoming strangers, it could open the door to sharing the gospel.

At a more personal level, our homes could be the only Christian environment our friends or our children's friends may encounter. So the next time our teenager suggests holding a birthday party, make our home party central and think less of how much we have to clean up after and more about how our homes can be a place where people encounter the love of Christ.

Perhaps in Singapore today, city-living has eroded much of the “kampong” spirit of years gone by when the doors to our homes were kept open, and sharing meals and company with our neighbours was not just an annual occurrence during “open house”. Can SJSJ, along with the church at large, be the example of what it means to be truly welcoming and hospitable? As one writer put it, “We shared a welcome. The welcome became a witness”. What a joy it will be if this happens frequently in SJSJ and in our own homes.

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Questions for Cell Discussion

Question 1

How would you rate SJSJ with regard to the 2 marks of transformation? Identify any obstacles that you think may be preventing you/your cell/SJSJ from being transformed in these two areas and how they can be overcome.

- Confidence in handling the Word and sharing the gospel
- Being welcoming and hospitable

Question 2

As a cell group, formulate an action plan to move closer towards being transformed in these two areas.

Pray for the Lord’s wisdom if your cell should work on each area separately or simultaneously and for the Holy Spirit’s enablement to carry out this action plan.