

“Being Rebuked”
13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2020
Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
Iao United Church of Christ

Romans 12:9-21
Matthew 16:21-28

Poem: *“You’ve Changed!”* by unknown Author

People tell me “you’ve changed.” Well, yeah, I did change and thank God because I don’t want to be the same person all my life. I want to change and grow. I want to experience new things and learn more about the world. I want to feel alive. I want to keep moving.

A farmer who had never been to the city was chosen by his grange to represent them at a national convention, and thus he found himself in New York. After checking in at the hotel, he approached an elevator, something he had never seen. He watched as an exceptionally large woman walked into the elevator. The door closed, what appeared to be a single hand on a large clock made a revolution, and the door opened again, this time discharging an attractive, curvaceous young lady. The astonished farmer ran to the nearest phone, called his wife, and said: “Martha, pack your bag and get here as quick as you can! I

found a place where you can get that form, we've been wantin' all these years!"

Whether we like it or not, change happens Iao Church. Who was ready for COVID19? For sure, not this pastor! But Iao Church was somewhat prepared. We had already been going live on Facebook before the pandemic. Maybe a lesson we can take out of this new experience is **if the church is going survive this ordeal, it must be willing to take on a new form.** Amen? You see beloved community, Peter wanted to rebuke Jesus because he wanted to keep things the same. While Jesus is headed to the cross, but to get there he needs to go into the elevator of Jerusalem to transform his church. Jesus is headed to the cross to create change – yet Peter is stuck on “sameness.”

In 1944 when Gallup asked Americans if they believed in God – 96% said they did. Even through 1967 – the polls showed that 94% to 98% still believed in God. In 2004 the poll was now at 90% who believed in God. In 2016 it was still high at 89%. Here's some more interesting numbers to think about and why the church is in need of transformation and reformation. In 1992 – 70% of Americans were regular attendees of some sort of worship. 25 years later – that number has dropped to 55% and

has continued to decline. In analyzing the polls, many people still consider religion important in their lives but did not attend a church regularly. There are many factors at play here but for many – the church has not been willing to jump into that elevator and come back in a new form. Like Peter, it has been comfortable with “sameness” – it has not revitalized itself to the 21st Century. An important factor for many is that they are looking for a church that is “being” the church and making a difference in the lives of the community. They are looking for a church that is not just a “Sunday only” kind of church but one that has taken on a new form – online presence; still feeding those in need; visible out in the community; thinks beyond the box; fearless; courageous; a “heart” kind of a church, meaning that people feel it in their hearts when they are in the presence of the members of the church. Not just on Sunday but every day. Not just in the Sanctuary but out on the streets of the community. A church is not conformed to this world – but transforms this world by words and actions – even if it has to take on a new form itself.

Those who are searching for a home church might have factors or benchmarks that they are looking for – were they

greeted at the door? Was their worship experience – “heart felt?” Did the church make them feel welcomed? One way that we fail, and I fail miserably is – was there a follow-up letter sent to them? Those who do come back might ask – is the church “being” the church or is it being run like a business? Is the focus on buildings and budgets or is the focus on ministering to the poor and needy? Does the ministry feed the whole body – mind, heart and soul. In our transformation – we do not want people to say – “I don’t go to church – I go to a business meeting.”

You see beloved community, Jesus was going to Jerusalem to “go to church.” What he found instead at the hands of the elders and chief priest and scribes was a – “business meeting.” Jesus was going to Jerusalem to walk into a transforming elevator as the single hand on a large clock made a three day revolution – Jesus would then emerge triumphant from the grave as the resurrected Christ. Peter though, Peter could not understand that transformation because again, he was stuck on “sameness.”

Beloved church, in the same way that people experience the presence of God in worship here in the Sanctuary – what is transforming before our very eyes today – is that people must

feel God's presence in and through our House Churches – and especially in and through Jesus' beloved church out in our communities. People must feel and see the transformed and reformed Jesus in us by our words and our actions out in a world that needs a transformed church. Here is an example of why we need to be transformed and reformed: In a certain mental hospital there was a youth who was able to keep from falling into mental depression by thinking about God's love. One day he asked a nurse to assure him that God loved him. Thinking the chaplain could do a better job, she asked the chaplain to speak to the boy. The next day the youth told the nurse, "Don't ever send that chaplain to see me again." "Why not?" she asked. "Didn't the chaplain tell you about God's love?" He answered, "No, he didn't. All he wanted to know was whether I would join the choir or attend Sunday school." This Iao church is why reformation needs to happen on a regular basis. We need to change not to conform but to transform and reform the needs of our world. When we define "reform" – "it is to improve by alteration." When the church reforms it is improved by change. Not just changes in bylaws and mission statements, but changes of the heart and soul of the church.

Another example was when an admiral recently took a poll of religious knowledge among his new recruits. He found that 77% did not know the Lord's Prayer, 62% did not know what happened on Christmas, and 55% could not explain the Easter event. Or when a pastor sat in on a sixth grade Sunday school class and asked one of the boys, "Who knocked down the walls of Jericho?" The boy answered, "I don't know, Reverend, but it sure wasn't me!" Distressed, the pastor turned to the teacher who said, "Pastor, if Tommy says he didn't do it, you can believe him because he's a good boy." The pastor was so upset he brought it before the Administrative Board. The Board listened sympathetically and then told him not to worry, that the trustees of the church would pay for the damage to the walls and try to hush the whole matter up.

Let us close with this beloved church and beloved virtual world. Just because we find ourselves worshiping from our House Churches or at other places – let us not be afraid to change. Let us take advantage of our current situation and be creative in our transformation and reformation. I am hoping that when Iao Church returns back to this Sanctuary for worship, that you will be a transformed and reformed kind of a church. That

you have faithfully and courageously met this challenge in becoming a new and different kind of church filled with faith, compassion, courage, strength and with a sense of “we can” attitude. **Do not be afraid to walk into that elevator of transformations and reformation. We may not come out as an attractive, curvaceous young lady or a muscular, handsome young man – but let us be transformed into a church that meets the needs of God’s people today – even if some would rebuke us.**

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.