

From deformed to transformed
Genesis 2:4-7, Jeremiah 18:1-4, Romans12:1-2

I bring Good News to you this morning, let's rejoice and be glad with the Good News. The Good News is that you can be a new being, a new person. Christianity is called the born again religion. This is the Good News. We hear this news a lot, so it sounds like a generic message you hear everywhere. But this news is indeed too good to be true. There is no better news in the world than this, that a man can be a new person again. I would like to explain what this means through the scripture readings from Genesis 2:4-7, Jeremiah 18:1-4 and Romans12:1-2. There are stories of human formation, deformation, reformation and transformation in today's scripture readings.

First of all, I would like to share a fun story of Gorilla which I made. One day three religious leaders -- a Catholic priest, a Baptist minister, and a Jewish rabbi -- got together and discussed an interesting topic: could a gorilla be turned into a religious animal? Gorillas look like humans. Gorillas are actually very similar to humans in many aspects. So if a gorilla could be trained in religious practice like a human, it would be sensational news. They discussed this idea thoroughly, and all three agreed: "Yes, a gorilla can be turned into a religious animal." So they decided to try training a gorilla, each according to his own religious discipline.

The first to try was the Catholic priest. He took a gorilla to the sanctuary and let it sit in a pew. He burned incense, brought the incense burner to the gorilla, and shook it in front of the gorilla's face to sanctify the creature. The smell and smoke bothered the gorilla. It attacked the Catholic Father, broke his arm and threw the incense burner away. The next day, the priest appeared to his fellow clergymen and shook his head, showing his broken, bandaged arm.

The next to try was the Baptist minister. He took the gorilla to a baptistery in his church, and immersed in the water to cleanse away its sin. The frightened gorilla reacted by breaking the minister's his neck and running away. The next day, the Baptist minister appeared to his friends wearing a plaster cast on his neck and shook his head. Two clergymen had failed to convert the creature.

Finally, the Jewish rabbi had his try. He took the gorilla to the mountain and bound the creature up with rope to a tree. And then he took a knife to give the creature a circumcision. You can imagine what happened next. The next morning, the rabbi didn't show up to meet his friends. He was in an emergency room with his face smashed by the angry gorilla's punch. He was knocked down, bitten on his neck and arms, and his legs were broken by the gorilla's pounding legs.

The gorilla cannot be changed to religious belief. That is impossible, because the gorilla is an animal. Is there any difference between the nature of man and that of a gorilla? Yes, there is a big difference in the level of being.

You know God's creation story well. This story is the formation story of human beings. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 inform us that human beings are shaped by God's hands. Interestingly, God created all other things in world, including mountains, plants, and animals by saying, "Let it be." However, with man, God formed him from the dust in his own image. And then God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And so, man became a living being. God created Adam by His hand, by His mouth and with His special care.

It may seem as if humans were brought into being in a very simple way. But actually this is not an easy and simple way to create a man. In order to change the dust on the ground to a living being, there are steps that cannot be skipped over. There are three steps to create a human being from dust to a living being. God created Adam all day long.

According to Genesis, God spent four days to create lands, plants, animals and Adam. God created land on the third day. On fourth day, God created plant life. On the sixth day God created animals. And the last, seventh day God created Man. God used one day for each category of creation. So there are four levels of being in the world. We call these: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human.

The mineral is the lowest level in being. Dust is mineral without life. Mineral is level one. The second level of being is vegetable. Plants have life, so they can grow. But a plant can't move by itself because it has no power to move. The third level of being is animal. Animals also have life, and they also grow. Animals also have the power to move, and have sensory awareness. Sensory awareness is the ability to feel, smell, eat, see and hear. Anything with senses can move itself. That is the difference between plants and animals.

The highest level of being in the world is human. Human beings have life, and so they can grow. A human also has sensory awareness, so he can move. And humans also have self-awareness, the ability to think, so he can build a house, make clothes, and cook. These are the huge leaps, from dust (mineral) to vegetable, then to animal, and finally to a human being. These levels of being are so far apart, they cannot be compared to each other.

Through Genesis, we can understand that God's creation is vast and amazing. The human being is the highest and greatest work of God. Human value can't be compared with any animal or plant. God formed Adam by His own hands, according to His image. And He gave His breath to humans so that humans can live for the glory of God. You and I are very expensive beings; we are priceless. This is the story of human formation.

In the Bible there is also the story of human deformation. Human are as fragile and vulnerable as clay. Human was made of clay and needed handle with care. The story of deformation is seen in the message of Jeremiah. The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord; "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give my message." So Jeremiah went down to the potter's house, and he saw the potter working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from clay was marred, deformed in his hands, so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him."

The potter is God, the Creator. The clay is man under God's shaping hands. A deformed pot is man deformed by sadness, misfortunate, and tragedy. Jeremiah received God's message for the deformed from the potter's house.

Jeremiah carefully observed the way of the potter. When the first design of the vessel turns out deformed and spoiled, he remolds it into another form (a transformation). If the clay is rebellious and will not respond to the design of the maker, it must be broken up. If the clay is still malleable, if it repents and turns from its evil, the maker can still fashion it into a vessel of usefulness; but if the clay has already hardened and set, the people must fall. The fingers of the maker have been working upon the people of God more and more firmly.

There is another theological explanation of human deformation. Paul explains to us in Romans 1:21 how humans became deformed by parting from God's grace. The Scripture reads: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." In other words, man is deformed by himself by parting from God's grace, or in other words, by sin. Through sin, we become ugly, deformed, and lose the dignity of being human beings. In Romans 1:28 Paul says, "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to depraved mind to do what ought not to be done."

I would like to introduce you the story of human reformation. The Bible emphasizes this human reformation. Here is the Christian message; "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." This is a message to those who are deformed in their life, that they can be transformed with a new life. The salvation means recovering, from the deformation to reformation and transformation.

Paul gave us this message to those of us who are willing to have new life: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by

the renewing of your mind." Renewing mind means, in other word, repentance. Have you heard Peter's first sermon? When the people heard Peter's sermon, they were cut to heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That is the process transforming Christian life.

As I mentioned earlier, human beings are unique in their self-awareness and conscious mind. The great affirmation of human being is like Descartes saying, "I think therefore I am." The only way we can change ourselves and life is to renew our minds.

Lastly, I found the eternal transformation of Christian in the Bible. The ultimate transformation of Christian is to have eternal and everlasting life. This is the ultimate hope in Christian faith. On the day of last judgment, we will be transformed from the perishable body to the imperishable body. In I Corinthians 15:51 we read: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flesh, in the twinkling of an eye, at the trumpet. For the trumpet will sound the dead will be raised imperishable, and will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with the immortal." Do you believe this eternal transformation? You and I will be transformed from the perishable to imperishable, from mortal to the immortal.

A 36 year-old lady once appeared as a special guest on a Korean TV show. She was short and hunch-backed, from an accident at age five. The interviewer asked her; "How is it that you have volunteered at an orphanage for eighteen years?" The woman told her story:

"I was so depressed by my deformed figure, that one day I attempted suicide, but failed. Several days later, I was planning to commit suicide again when I heard somebody working on a fence outside my house. I thought it was a thief, so I went out carefully to look. But it was not a thief. He was a rag-picker. He was a young, about my age, wearing tattered clothes, bearing a heavy net bag, and looking for something in my trash can. I cried out; 'There's nothing there but trash!' But he said to me: 'In your eyes these things are trash, but in my eyes they are reusable treasures. If I am lucky I can find a gold ring or an envelope full of cash in this trash.'

The young man seemed happy even if he wore tattered clothes and carried a heavy bag. A few days later, I heard the gospel from my friend, that God can reuse people like me. I opened my eyes wide when I heard the message, and I made a commitment to God. I have I have helped these orphans with pleasure for the last eighteen years.

She thought she was a deformed but she found God, who transformed her. God is with you, and wants your life be changed, from the deformed to reformed and transformed. God is working among us.