

Children’s Moment

Good morning, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We hope you are safe and well.

I have a great story to share with you today. It’s a before-and-after story about a dog named Remy. Here’s the “before” picture, when Remy was a stray dog in a humane society enclosure.

Remy had no home. Even worse, Remy had a badly broken leg that hadn’t received any treatment. After he was taken to the shelter, a doctor cared for him, but Remy lost his leg.

Someone who cared posted a picture of Remy on Facebook. Brianna and her boyfriend saw the picture and adopted him. To quote Brianna, “He’s been the perfect dog!”¹ Here’s the “after” picture.

Brianna says, “We take him hiking and on road trips. His favorite trick is High Five. [Best of all], he’s been a phenomenal brother to two dogs I’ve fostered. We can’t imagine life without him!”²



Maybe you have a dog or cat you’ve adopted into your family. That’s a wonderful thing to do. It makes a big difference in the life of your pet and your family is made better, too.

We aren’t pets, but the same thing happens when Jesus comes into our lives. We find out we can be loved, just the way we are. Through Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family. What we were before goes away – we are forgiven for the bad things we do and healed from the things that hurt our heart, mind and spirit.

¹ <https://barkpost.com/good/before-after-pics-again/>

² *Ibid*

Even better, when we become part of God’s family, our real family is made better. Instead of feeling sad and down all the time, we find peace, joy and hope. Just like Remmy, there may be some things that don’t come back, but we find life is good.

So, when Jesus comes to you, let him into your heart. You’ll be glad and so will your family.

Will you pray with me?

You are invited to be part of Sunday School online!

Visit us at www.coronaumc.com/childrensministry to sign up.

Message: “What is This?”

Do you love “before and after” stories? Esperanza and I do. If you’re like us and millions of other people, we regularly tune into shows like “Flip or Flop” or the latest one “Home Town.” The creators of these shows know that we like Cinderella stories.

Here are a couple of examples of some house makeovers:

- The first is a make over of house in Albany, NY.
- The second is the make over of a room – what a change!



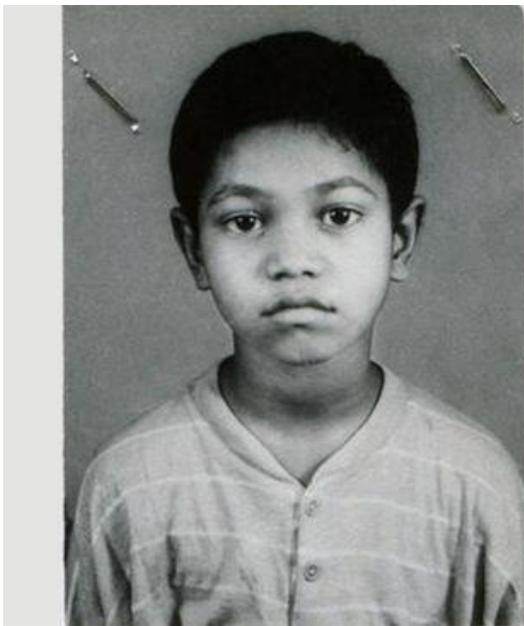
We love to dream about how things could change. It’s why Home Depot, Lowe’s and other retailers support the do-it-yourself interests of people. They’re tapping into our desire to be better.

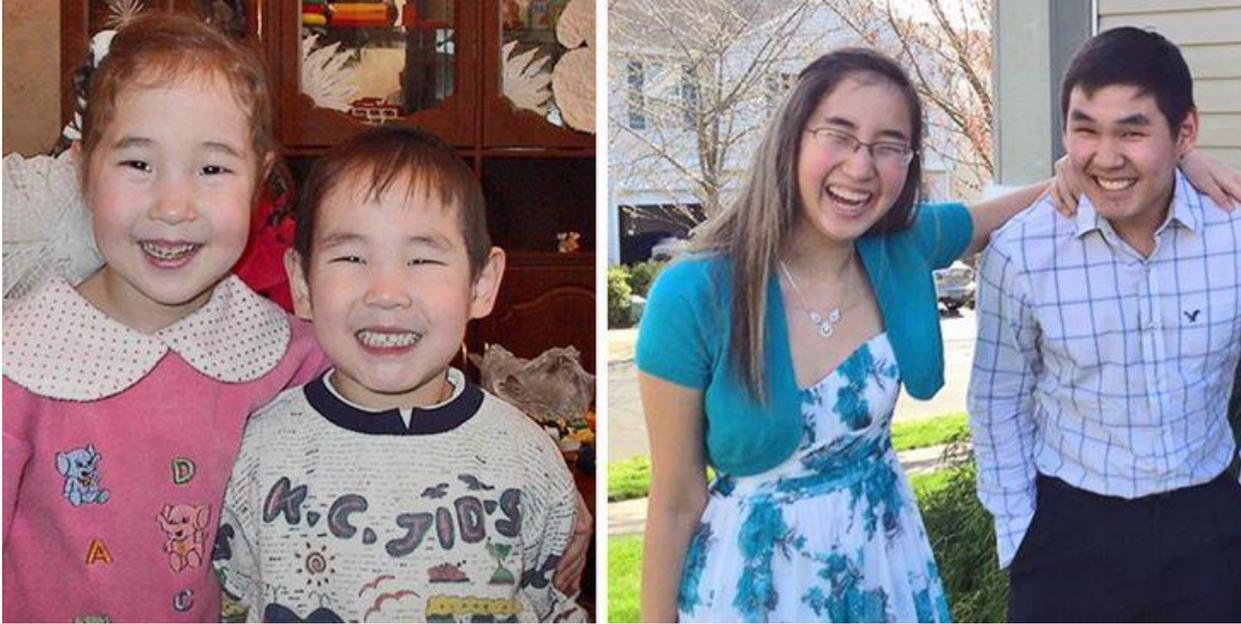
It’s one thing to make over a house, but another thing to make over a living creature. Here are a couple of examples of rescue dogs who had a make over. Even better, they were adopted.



These are amazing transformations. I invite you to visit the church web site and download the manuscript of this sermon. There are links to some of these amazing adoption stories. If you have adopted a cat or a dog, thank you. It’s a wonderful act of compassion for one of God’s creatures. And there’s a benefit: your lives will be made better, too.

There are “before and after” stories with an even greater impact. When the lives of children are touched, the transformation is even more amazing. Here are a couple of touching examples of children whose lives were changed by adoption.





It's hard to imagine how much these children will give back, the blessing they will pass on throughout their lives, all as a result of compassion and care. That's the power of love.

You may be wondering: why is pastor sharing these "before and after" stories? I assure you it's not because I was browsing and saw some interesting stories and pictures this week. I'm sharing them because they are stories of transformation. And transformation is one of the key themes from our scripture reading for today, Mark 1:21-28.

Jesus comes into our lives in a way that shakes up the status quo. Jesus' love is so powerful that we are transformed, from the inside-out, when we accept his love. That's the power of grace and the confidence we receive when we are adopted as children of God.

How do you get that from the verses we read? I invite you to get your Bible out, open it to the first chapter of Mark, and join me as we explore God's living and active Word.

The first thing we need to do is to look at the context. By that I mean the background. What was going on? Who's involved? Was there a particular circumstance or situation that is being addressed? By looking at this information, we put ourselves in the right frame to understand what the narrative reveals.

Mark’s narrative gets straight to the point. The first chapter begins with John the Baptist calling people to be baptized. Jesus comes to the river, is baptized and God reveals that Jesus is God’s Son, God with us. Jesus is led into the wilderness where he is tempted and prepared for ministry.

Jesus begins his public ministry by calling the first disciples, two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. They literally drop what they were doing and follow Jesus.

If you’ll forgive me, I’ll add a side note. The rabbinic style of teaching is different than our Western style of teaching. It’s more like going to a dojo or a gym to take a class. The instructor doesn’t sit down and explain what the martial art or exercise is for. They get you involved in doing the practice, offering teaching and instruction during the breaks. That’s the way Jesus led and taught the disciples. We learn best when we are active in the mission Jesus gave us, connecting and engaging, sharing our faith and caring for others.

This leads us to verses 21-28. Jesus leads the disciples from the shore of the sea of Galilee to Capernaum. It wasn’t far. We know Simon and Andrew’s family lived there (v29). Capernaum is on a hill, so most likely they climbed the hill to where the house was.

We also learn something about Jesus’ lifestyle. The first thing we read is that when the sabbath came, Jesus went to the synagogue. But he did more than that. Jesus taught the congregation. And he did so in a unique way. Most rabbis taught by reading a verse from the Torah and then referencing the Mishnah, the interpretations of well-known and established rabbis of the past.

Jesus taught them his own interpretation. He didn’t rely on the teachings of other scholars. This gave his words power and authority that was, and is, unusual. Jesus’ teaching reveals God’s will. That’s the ultimate authority. That’s why scripture is the primary source for our understanding of God today.

Then the unexpected happens. There’s a commotion in the middle of the service. Over the years we’ve been together, we’ve experienced

interruptions and surprises during services. God's grace covers those moments. This interruption is different.

Marks records the scene: *"Suddenly, while still in the meeting place, he was interrupted by a man who was deeply disturbed and yelling out, 'What business do you have here with us, Jesus? Nazarene! I know what you're up to! You're the Holy One of God, and you've come to destroy us!'"* (v23-24, MSG).

Jesus responded immediately. Jesus shut him up: *"Quiet! Get out of him!"* The afflicting spirit threw the man into spasms, protesting loudly - and got out (vv25-26). The person was calm.

I'll sure there was a long moment of silence. You've experienced that. There's furious activity and then – all of a sudden, there's this pause, which is immediately followed by the buzz of conversation as everyone talks about what they just experienced.

The same thing happened then. Everyone is amazed. They're amazed at Jesus' way of teaching and the way he backs it up. Jesus shows he has the power to go with his authority. That makes all the difference.

Here are two things come out this moment. First, word about Jesus immediately begins to spread throughout Galilee. His name is on many people's lips, even if they don't really know much about him.

The second thing is the transformation. Lives were touched and changed in that moment. The first is the life of the person who spoke out. Depending on which translation you read, you'll find the words "deeply disturbed" or "demonic" used to describe the person's situation. They were struggling with evil. They embodied evil, hidden away from the rest of the group, yet in plain sight in this moment.

We hesitate to use the word evil when it relates to human actions. In our post-Enlightenment understanding of human nature, we believe we are made in God's image and God sees us as good (Genesis 1:31). We ask, "How can evil be in us?" Yet there is evil in the world that is greater than the evil in human hearts.

There are "powers and principalities" beyond our understanding. I believe that and I know many of you do as well. Some of you have

shared a bit of your experience with the spiritual forces of evil. Paul puts it this way, "*We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens*" (Ephesians 6:13, CEB).

Not only was the person struggling with evil, but evil was present in the group. There was a spiritual malaise - a numbness, that had crept in over time. This happens in groups today, inside and outside the church. In 1963 the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is ... on Sunday morning."³

Regardless of our position on the personification of demons in the enlightened age, it's hard to deny we are surrounded by the demonic in our world today - haunted by it, perhaps. Sometimes it affects households within our church. We might name it mental illness, or addiction, or systemic racism, or the cycle of poverty. That there are powers and principalities in the world over which we have little power seems undeniable.

What are we to do? We need help. We need Jesus.

No matter whether you believe in the presence of demonic beings or see them as the expression of mental health issues or greed and selfish ambition, the reality is that we, as individuals and as members of a group, need salvation and transformation.

We can be adopted into the divine family and have our own "before and after" experience. The way to do so is to listen to Jesus without fear. Jesus comes into our lives to make them better. Yet we hear and say, "We don't want that!" I know. I said it for twenty years. And, if you pressed the point, I became offensive in my desire to escape. We ask if Jesus has come to destroy us, destroy our lifestyle, destroy our image of ourselves, our self-confidence, our self-dependence. Don't be afraid of change, embrace a power than greater than yourself. Pardon and healing come from surrender and then we are transformed.

Jesus comes to save us from the evil that seeks to trap us. He enters in our lives. It isn't easy. The chains are of our own making. Yes, there are physical and mental aspects making us vulnerable, but our spirit is

³ <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/eleven-oclock-on-sundays-is-still-the-most-segregated-hour-in-america/>

ours. What we choose to do with our will directs our spiritual life. We can choose to embrace love, compassion and follow Jesus or we can choose to embrace apathy, nihilism and follow our own self-interest.

We are people on a journey of transformation, and it isn't always easy. Today, let's acknowledge the hard work of becoming disciples and of setting aside the weight that clings so closely. Let's hand over the reins of our lives so we can be led into wholeness. And by doing so, we can share our stories of wholeness with the broken world around us.

Let our worship not be burdened by defining the demonic, but by praising the power that conquers everything that would hold us down. Let's praise the one – Jesus, who breaks the chain of oppression in whatever forms it presents itself. And let us join in sharing the good news of how Jesus sets us free, not fearing any power, not shrinking from any evil but offering grace and a way to wholeness.

When we do, we'll hear Jesus' call: "Follow me!"

Mark 1:21-28 (CEB)

Jesus and his followers went into Capernaum. Immediately on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and started teaching. The people were amazed by his teaching, for he was teaching them with authority, not like the legal experts. Suddenly, there in the synagogue, a person with an evil spirit screamed, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God."

"Silence!" Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. "Come out of him!" The unclean spirit shook him and screamed, then it came out.

Everyone was shaken and questioned among themselves, "What's this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands unclean spirits and they obey him!" Right away the news about him spread throughout the entire region of Galilee.