

I want to start this morning with a personal story, for 3 reasons

**Firstly**, its already one of my big God moments of 2022.

**Secondly**, it speaks into the spirit of Waitangi Day which I do want to acknowledge and honour.

**Thirdly**, it speaks into one of the greatest learnings of my whole faith, and transformation walk. **That we worship God, to be transformed by God, into the shape of God, so that we can encounter and experience more of God in every aspect of our lives. And my personal experience is that the more I've cultivated the spirit of worship into my life, the more I've encountered God's presence in all the experiences my life.**

So here's the story.

Back in the first week of January, through the lovely generosity of a friend, we had a few days in Port Waikato. I spent most of my time just chilling and gazing at this.



A beautiful nature reserve right in front of us. And pretty much every day a bird of prey (we think a hawk), would majestically survey its domain. And there's something special and sacred about birds of prey. The ancient symbol for John's Gospel is the eagle. I couldn't help but reflect on how this creature of God was big part of my spiritual restoration.

On our final day we had planned to go to the local Marae because my good friend and yours, Rev Stan Thorburn, had told us this incredible story of how his great, great, grandfather (an Englishmen called Charles Marshall) was carved into the local Marae, as part of their ancestral Whakapapa.

It turns out that Charles had jumped ship (as you do) and landed in Port Waikato. And he completely integrated himself into Māori culture (including marrying the local Chiefs daughter). So much so, that he was known as the Pakeha Māori.

So Kim and I made our way to Marae pretty excited to see this. When we got there, we even more excited because this is what we saw. 1<sup>st</sup> IMAGE



It was a deeply moving time and as we were about to leave Kim said to me, “that felt pretty sacred’ and I said yeah Tapu (Holy) And at the exact moment I said holy, who should appear but our friend the bird of prey. It flew right above us in all its majestic glory. The full wingspan. It was truly a God moment, brush with the divine.

Feeling elated we went back to the Bach, put our stuff in the car and then just before we driving away, we like to say a prayer of thanks for the generosity and the gift. Just as I was finishing our prayer, with unbelievable timing, once again the Hawk appeared and flew over the roof of the Bach for the first time on our stay. It was as if this awesome bird was blessing us with a final goodbye.

As I said, the reason I tell you all this is because I’m a very great believer, that the more we cultivate a life steeped in the spirit of worship then the more our hearts, minds and imaginations are transformed and renewed to see the divine breaking in to the everyday. Our eyes are opened to notice more the presence of God. As King David said in our Psalm. Seek, dwell and meditate on the beauty of the Lord, to behold the beauty of the Lord.

**So today I want to look at Pauls words of wisdom to the early Roman church on worship as transformation.** Because if Paul had a core mantra in all his letters, it was this. **We worship God, to be transformed by God, into the shape of God to experience more of God.** And for Paul this was always, always, centred in and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**So let’s dive in to Paul’s first words of his letter.**



**12 And so, dear brothers and sisters, “I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all God has done for you. Let your bodies be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind our God will find acceptable.”**

I want to just highlight those first 6 words because here’s the first truth of an authentic Christian worship life. It takes place primarily with **each other**. As brothers and sisters in Christ. We proclaim, a Triune God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so at the very heart of our faith is a divine relational community of self-giving love. In the beginning was relationship.

And again, this is a real mantra of Pauls running through all his letters to all the early churches. He reminds them over and over, that the deep work of worship and transformation can only really happen in a **community** of worshippers. A community of followers who are committed to bearing with one another and caring for one

another, through the good times and the challenging times. The ‘one another’ is the sacredness of relationships.

Its why I often change some of the worship song lyrics to WE instead of just I. Because my story and your story are part of OUR story which is part of THE Story. And it’s this call for a genuine commitment to a life lived in the spirit of worship that Paul continues with in his next words.

Romans 12:1  
 “I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all God has done for you— them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind our God will find acceptable.”  
 The deep distinction of our Christian faith. Grounded and embodied in the everyday functions of our lives. The Word became flesh.

**“I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all God has done for you. Let your bodies be a living and holy sacrifice**

I wonder how many of us give much thought to how important our bodies are, in the life of our worship. But we shouldn’t be surprised because the deep distinction of our Christian faith is that its Incarnational. Its grounded and **embodied** in the everyday functions of our lives. After all, the Word became flesh. The Word wept, got angry and got tired. The Word shared food with friends and strangers and experienced such deep loneliness and anguish, that the Word sweated like drops of blood. As always, Eugene Peterson cuts to the heart of things with his Message translation of Paul’s words.

Romans 12:1 Message Translation  
 “So here’s what I want you to do, with God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life— your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life— and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.”

**12 1-2 So here’s what I want you to do, with God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.**

I find this deeply encouraging wisdom from Paul. Because it validates our everyday endeavours. The blood, the sweat and tears of our lives have worth to God. And God wants us to bring it before him as our sacred human offering.

It also shows us that the beating heart of a worship life is a grateful heart. We love because God first loves us.

**How have you personally found encouragement from being in a worshipping community these past 6 months? I know from so many that it’s this connection with each other, that’s help sustain us. We now have different challenges ahead of us. How can we all play a part in bearing and caring for each other in and through the way of Christ?**

## Having emphasised the BODY in the importance of our worship, Paul now emphasises the MIND

Romans 12:1  
 "This is truly the way to worship God.  
 Don't copy the behaviour and customs  
 of this world.  
 Don't conform to the patterns of this world.  
 Instead let God transform you into a new  
 person by changing the way you think.  
 Be transformed by renewing of your minds.

**This is truly the way to worship God. 2 Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world. Instead let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.**

**Again, more great encouragement from Paul in those words... let God transform you.**

Transformation in Christ isn't a journey of striving. I have met many Christians who get into a mindset of "I must do better, I must do better". But is this really a transformation journey centred on God's unconditional grace and love? Our transformation sanctification journey is more a journey of yielding. **Surrendering to the Spirit's work. To let God, be God in our lives,** and let the Spirit change the way we think.

Most of us will have heard the ancient wisdom that reveals the importance of renewing our minds.

**Be careful of what you think because your thoughts become your words. Be careful of your words because your words become your actions. Be careful of your actions because these become your habits. Be careful of your habits because these become you Character. The fruits of our character, begin in the mind**

As someone who came to the faith late in life and having been in a band - and having lived a life that was bit 'prodigal'. I can really relate to how a life lived in worship can play such a huge part in our transformation.

**Do you remember that line from William Temples worship quote that we've had for the past 2 weeks?**

Worship is the quickening of the conscience  
 by God's holiness!  
 "Quicken" means to awaken, arouse,  
 'make more alive'... become more sharply attuned.  
 What was OF GOD in the world around me  
 and even more important,  
 what was OF GOD in my own heart  
 Worship is about encountering God to be  
 transformed by God into the image of God.

He said that... **Worship is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness!**

This is the line that grabbed me because of the word '**Quicken**'. It's not a word we really use much nowadays. But it's a beautifully apt word for the journey of transformation and the renewing of our minds. Because it means to 'awaken', 'arouse', and 'make more alive'... become more sharply attuned.

And I can really relate to this, because when I first came to church, I didn't really get WORSHIP. I kind of thought, what the God of the entire universe is so insecure, that this God needs to be worshipped by US. What's that all about?

But of course, I started to realise (slowly) this isn't what worship is about at all.

**Worship is about encountering God, to be transformed by God into the image of God through the shape of Christ.**

And as I slowly committed to coming to church each week, I began to realise that my conscience was being quickened by the Holiness of God. By praying, singing sacred songs, opening up the scriptures, sharing confession and Holy Communion...I was becoming more sharply attuned to what was good and pleasing to God. And what was not. In the world around me, but even more importantly, in my OWN HEART.

And here's a confession about all of this. I found some of this journey deeply uncomfortable and I still do. Because I don't always want to go to spiritual places that I know will demand more of me. But as I also realised, if I'm going to be serious in any way about following Christ, with any kind of credibility. Then this will involve being taken to a place called **uncomfortable and challenging**. But it will also take me to a place called **life-changing** and **life-giving**.

I going to finish, with what I believe is probably my biggest learning and privilege of my 20-year journey of worship. And it's all captured in these words from that profound quote by William Temple that I'd like us all to ponder just once more.

"Worship is the submission  
of all of our nature to God.  
It is the quickening of the conscience  
by God's holiness;  
the nourishment of mind with God's truth;  
the purifying of our imagination  
by God's beauty;  
the opening of our hearts to God's love;  
the surrender of our will to God's purpose.  
All this gathered up in adoration,  
the most selfless emotion  
of which our nature is capable."  
William Temple

**"Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness; the nourishment of mind with God's truth; the purifying of our imagination by God's beauty; the opening of our hearts to God's love; the surrender of our will to God's purpose--all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable."**

This is William Temple echoing St Paul. That true worship is giving all that have and all that are as a living sacrifice. A life of worship can't be half hearted.

If we want to encounter God, to be transformed by God, into the image of God, so we can experience more of God, in and through Christ... then it has to be a full immersion. The full immersion of our conscience, our mind, our imaginations, our hearts and our will. As Jesus said, this is the greatest commandment in all of scripture. ... **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength"**. For such a time as this, with all the huge

**challenges we now have as a gathered worship community... isn't this the privilege of our calling, our challenge, AND our great encouragement.**