

Year C*Easter 3*2010*We Can Change!
Rick Lawler

We can change.

It is at the heart of the Christian gospel.

-A hard-hearted, dogmatic, violent, fanatic, named Saul, can become a peace-loving, softer-hearted, truly spiritual man, named Paul.

-A flip-flopping, cowardly, blow-hard, named Simon can become a courageous, joy-filled, witness to the resurrection named Peter.

- A seven-demon-possessed (I don't know exactly what that means but it can't be good) woman named Mary Magdalene can be healed to become Jesus' closest friend and the first witness to his resurrection.

We can change.

Australian Cartoonist Michael Leunig prays, so simply,

God help us to change.

To change ourselves and to change our world.

To know the need for it.

To deal with the pain of it.

To feel the joy of it.

To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.

The art of gentle revolution.

Amen.

It was Jesus that changed Simon, Saul and Mary, directly, by calling their names. There is a moment in each of their lives when Jesus calls them by their name and that moment of hearing everything changes.

Paul was in charge of arresting Christians, confiscating their property and sometimes putting them to death. He's on his way to do just that in Damascus when. . .

“Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”¹

Peter, still, reeling from his own betrayal of Jesus and the impossible resurrection when the Risen Lord asks him three times,

“Simon son of John, do you love me?”²

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ac 9:3-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

²*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 21:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Mary Magdalene, forever blessed first witness to the Impossible is stumbling for a foothold before the empty tomb “When she . . . turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.”¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).³

Saul, Simon, Mary.

He calls them all by name.

One of the magical, mystical, things about Jesus is that he can change us by simply saying our names.

He says my name too.

“Rick, Rick, why are you persecuting me?”

or, “Rick, son of Joseph, do you love me?”

or, sometimes, simply, and gently, “Rick”.

Sometimes he says it with sadness,

sometimes joy,

every time he says my name I change.

He says your name too.

How gently he says the names of the soldiers who died this week. . .

Joseph,

Michael,

Sean.

How gently he says the names of their mothers and fathers.

How gently he says the name Max, a ten year old boy who died of cancer yesterday.

Or Jerry who is gravely ill.

Or Derald who is in the hospital.

Or Atlee Sterling Harvey, grandson of Sterling and Nancy Hutcheson, born early on Friday morning.

The art of gentle change starts with our weakness and Jesus’ gentleness.

³*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 20:14-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Our religion turns this world upside down.
Strength is, in the end, not in armies and guns and money.
Strength is in love and sacrifice and believing.

Let's look at John's great vision of heavenly worship. John sees the heavens opened. He looks into the heart of Reality and says,

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice. . . ,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,

“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever!”

And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped.⁴

At the heart of all reality,
at the heart of adoration, blessing, honor, glory, and power. . . is a lamb. . . a lamb that
what slain.

At the heart of God is a wounded lamb.

We may be in awe but we should never be afraid.

We should be in awe of a God who comes gently.

We should be in awe of our own woundedness and that of our fellow human beings.

We should be in awe of power manifested by a lamb that was slain.

We should be in awe of gentleness.

The Lamb is, of course, a symbol of innocence, purity, but also powerlessness and joy. A lamb is a strange package to hold the heart of God whom we routinely call Almighty.

But isn't real power given to us in gentleness?

I remember a day when a friend prayed for me and laid his hands gently on my head, and spoke tenderly to me, and with tears in my eyes something shifted in me that many years later became the power to change.

Real power starts in a broken place.

Real power starts where someone is tender,
someone is loving,

⁴*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Re 5:11-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

someone is forgiving,
someone is grieving.

Real power has little to do with threats, weapons, and coercion.
The day comes for all of us when we are not protected,
or the one we love is not shielded, but vulnerable and suffering.
God is in the heart of that moment like the Lamb who was slain is in the eternal heart of
heavenly worship.

Lamb power brings down empires, outlives tyrants, heals injustice.
Lamb power carries us through death and loss to a new heaven and a new earth.
Lamb power forgives people with swords and shields and spears.
Lamb power doesn't make us invulnerable it makes vulnerability the path to liberation.

The world wants to praise great weapons and huge amounts of money, beauty, education,
fame, but the real praise belongs to the Lamb. This is the radical, counter-cultural,
proclamation of the Church.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

Jesus is the Lamb who was slain for us.
He speaks our name from a place of infinite tenderness.
Saul, why do you persecute me.
Simon, do you love me.
Or, simply, Mary.
Again, the words of the cartoonist Michael Leunig.

Dear God,
We celebrate the spring's returning and the rejuvenation of the natural world. Let us be
moved by the vast and gentle insistence that goodness shall return, that warmth and life
shall succeed. Help us to understand our place within this miracle. Let us see that as a
bird now build its nest, bravely, with bits and pieces, so we must build human faith. It is
our simple duty; it is the highest art; it is our natural and vital role within the miracle of
spring: the creation of faith.

Amen.

(from *When I Talk to You: A Cartoonist Talks to God*)

It is not easy believing in the Lamb of God. We can be so easily seduced into
worshipping power through strength,
or through military might,
or through political clout,
or through being rich, or light-skinned, or educated,
but people without these things can be very powerful in truth.

There was a man from God who shook to corridors of power and privilege
through Lamb power,
through free speech,
through willingness to suffer and sacrifice rather than strike back with weapons and hate.
His feast day past by quietly on April 4,
the morning we celebrated the Lamb of God risen.

At his own moment of vulnerability he heard the Lord Jesus call his name, Martin. In a
tremendous moment of vulnerability and true power he said,

“I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really
doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. Like anybody I
would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I am not concerned about that
now. I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And
I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I
want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I’m
happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes
have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” (quoted in *Let the Trumpet Sound*, page
486)

We can change.
We can hear the Lord Jesus call our name.
We can be liberated from sin,
or fear,
or violence,
or apathy,
by the Lamb that was slain,
by the tender heart of the Living God.