

t doesn't take much to transform some situations. A simple slip on the wet grass - my leg broke and immediately life took on a new perspective, as even the simplest of tasks became a major exercise. Now, as I sit recovering at my bedroom window, I see another scene gradually transforming before my eyes: snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils begin to burst into flower, covering the bare earth with splashes of glorious colour.

I've just finished reading a book by Desmond Tutu, God has a dream, a vision of hope for our time. 1 The dream of transformation he describes seems a far cry from grim reality as portrayed on our television screens. We could be forgiven for thinking that the world is beyond such hope. Responding to our problems in the UK, Tony Blair is trying to transform our society with calls for more respect, a greater police presence and education system reform. Gordon Brown, meanwhile, dreams of making global poverty history. Yet, Bishop Tutu reminds us that God has a dream - a dream of transformation:

I have a dream, God says. Please help me to realise it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, that my children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, my family.

Recalling his own experiences under the South African apartheid regime, Tutu remembers that transformation can occur in even the most oppressive circumstances. And although we sometimes have to wait a while, such regimes must fall because God made us for freedom. 2 Tutu has seen God honour his word.

I am reminded of a video I once saw that looked at the amazing ways in which whole neighbourhoods and towns around the world had been transformed by the gospel.³ In each case, the changes began as local churches came together in renewed, right relationships that were living expressions of forgiveness, unity and reconciliation.

Transformation begins in the heart of God and involves the cross, itself a symbol of a cruel and oppressive regime. Lasting personal transformation can only happen if we come to the cross where Jesus died, acknowledge our sin, and surrender our lives to Christ's lordship. 4 It is a gradual process as God's Spirit works in us, transforming us into his likeness. 5 The more time we spend with someone, the more alike we become. 6 We need to offer our bodies to him and allow his word to penetrate and transform our minds. And as we ask him to create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us, then we will find that he causes us to walk in his ways. 7 This process demands our active participation and collaboration. We need to put some things off and put other things on but he will renew our minds. As he does so, the transformation will take place and God's dream will become a reality.8

Peter Armon is CMF Overseas Support Secretary

references

- Tutu, D. God has a Dream. London: Rider and co, 2005
- 2. Habbakuk 2:3
- www.sentinelgroup.org/ showing.asp
- 4. Acts 4:12
- 5. 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 6. Romans 12:1-2
- Psalm 51:10: Ezekiel 36:25-27
- 8. Ephesians 4:22-24