

TRANSFORMED AND ALWAYS TRANSFORMING



Scripture:

Exodus 24:12-18

¹²The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” ¹³So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”

¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. ¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1-9

¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



**When I awoke this morning
The world was radiant with newness
Indoors and outdoors, all had been scrubbed
clean
The sky had achieved a blue that seemed
beyond blueness
Whites were whiter than white,
greens were greener than green
And the edges of everything,
Windows, walls, tree trunks, blades of grass
Stood apart from the edges of everything else
With exquisite clarity**

**How can I explain this?
Revelation? Transfiguration?
No – successful cataract operation.**

That’s a poem from Judith Viorst’s book titled: *Unexpectedly Eighty and Other Adaptations*. She highlights in this poem part of God’s message for us in this transfiguration passage. Jesus was transformed, not just to prepare for his crucifixion and to affirm his identity as the son of God, but Jesus was also reminding us of God’s glory that is all around us if we just open our eyes to see the

beauty and follow his way of being in the world.
And God added listen!

EPIPHANY TO TRANSFIGURATION

Today is the concluding Sunday for the season of Epiphany. This is the close of the season that began with the mysterious miracle of the Baby Jesus. We waited, we watched, alongside the Magi, we adored him. We stood in awe and celebrated God's amazing abundant love for us wrapped up in the body of a precious baby.

Now we are standing in awe gazing at the adult Jesus on this mysterious miraculous Transfiguration Sunday. But rather than celebrate with gift giving, we must admit, we are somewhat confused.

This glorifying event of Jesus is one of the more mysterious things recorded in the Bible. We understand the transfiguration was Christ's purification ritual, making Jesus ready to persevere in the trials that led up to his self-sacrifice on the cross. But the transfiguration was so mystifying to the disciples who witnessed it, they could barely speak.

When Peter finally spoke after he recognized Moses and Elijah were with Jesus, he blubbered out something about, "It is good for us to be here." And, "Let me make three dwellings, one for each of you."

LISTEN

In response, God personally yells at Peter to listen to his son with whom he is well pleased! Good reminder for us all, isn't it?

Poor Peter has acted once again before he fully understands what and who Jesus is. This scolding of Peter by God happens just six days after being rebuked by Jesus for trying to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem.

**Sometimes it is best to let the mystery
unfold and not try to control it
or make it into something
our small minds can comprehend.
That is faith.
Sitting in the mystery of God and just
knowing: "It is good to be here."**

To help us understand the interactions between God and Jesus and Peter, Matthew 16 gives us the context of what the disciples had been taught six days before this transfiguration event. Starting with verse 21, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'²³ But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16: 21-25)

After that pep talk, I'm sure Peter, James and John were excited about being chosen to accompany Jesus on the trip up the mountain. Wouldn't you be?

TRY TO BE KIND

Have you ever used that line, "Get Behind me Satan"? I actually used it once. Many years ago in Maryland, while waiting to pick up my son Ryan at Taekwondo class. Another mom who was waiting for her son tried to talk me out of giving a homeless woman a ride to a shelter. She said if I let her into my car, I might get sued. She warned me that the woman might make up a claim against me. All my brain could think of in response was, "Get behind me Satan!"

Ryan was about seven years old at the time. So on the way to the car after the class was over, I anticipated he might ask why Jane, the homeless woman waiting in the car, smelled so awful. I told him not to say anything about her smell or it might make her feel bad.

So, on our drive to the shelter, I was glad Ryan was pretty quiet in the car. And then he decided to say something positive about Jane.

In his loudest voice Ryan said, "Well, Mom, I don't think Jane smells so bad. In fact, I think she smells kinda good!"

The transfiguration story of Jesus is full of mystery and wonder. So are little boys. But In every

circumstance you find yourself in, today, tomorrow and the next, you are to do as Ryan and act as much like Jesus as possible for us imperfect humans. That is our job as a disciples of Christ. Ryan was trying his best to be kind to Jane. Peter was trying too. And when we are trying to act like Jesus, we are doing our part to transform the world around us into the kingdom of God.

WHAT IS THE LORD ASKING OF ME?

Have you read the book *Gilead*? It won a Pulitzer Prize in 2005. The author, Marilynne Robinson, describes the life of a congregational pastor in Gilead, Iowa. In one part of the story the good old pastor (main character) explains how to be Christ like all the time. He says,

"When you encounter another person, when you have dealings with anyone at all, it is as if a question is being put to you. What is the Lord asking of me in this moment, in this situation? If you confront insult or antagonism, your first impulse will be to respond in kind. But you can think, as it were, that this is an emissary sent from the Lord, and some benefit is intended for me. This is an occasion to demonstrate my faithfulness, the chance to show that I do in some small degree participate in the grace that saved me."

That is why I picked up Jane. I would want someone to do the same for me.

On the topic of transfiguration, Marilynne Robinson wrote, "It has seemed to me sometimes as though the Lord breathes on this poor gray ember of Creation and it turns to radiance - for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again. To look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light. Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see."

ALWAYS TRANSFORMING

Have you ever had an incident of awareness or revelation that transformed you and transfigured your life? We are constantly being transformed and always transforming. Your mind and spiritual state of being have the biggest effect on your ongoing transformation.

Dr. Deepak Chopra explains it this way: "Consider that in this very moment, your body is rapidly changing as it exchanges its atoms and molecules with the rest of the universe. In fact, the body you're using right now is not the same body you woke up with this morning.

"The fifty trillion cells in your body are constantly transmitting and transforming as they keep your heart beating, digest your food, eliminate toxins, protect you from infection and disease, and carry out the functions that keep you alive. While these processes may seem out of your conscious control, hundreds of studies have shown that nothing holds more power over the body than the mind which you can control.

"Every thought, feeling, and emotion creates a molecule known as a neuropeptide. Neuropeptides travel throughout your body and hook onto receptor sites of cells and neurons. Your brain takes in the information, converts it into chemicals, and lets your whole body know if there's trouble.

"Your body is directly influenced as these molecules course through the bloodstream, delivering the energetic effect of whatever your brain is focused on. If you are peaceful, loving and faithful, your body will respond to that state of being.

But if you sincerely say, for example, "I have a sad heart," then you literally and physically probably have a sad heart. If we looked inside your heart, we would most likely find it affected by the stress of excessive amounts of adrenaline and cortisol. But if you say to your heart, "I'm bursting with joy and peace," a scientist could analyze your skin and find it is being loaded with neuropeptides that have antidepressant effects transforming you. Your blood would show the presence of higher levels of interleukin and interferon, which are powerful anticancer proteins that your immune system produces more of when you feel emotionally positive." (That doesn't mean that you should always be stoic. But trust your mind has an affect over your body's matter.)

HAVING THE COURAGE TO TRANSFORM

No matter what, your body is transforming constantly. But you have an influence on your transformation if you have the fortitude and courage to deeply guide it in a positive direction. A good role model in having the courage to transform is Philippe Kodjale (working at projection today). In Philippe's home country of the Ivory Coast, dogs can be dangerous. They roam in packs and might attack people when they are sick or hungry.

Before coming to the United States, Philippe had never been around tame dogs that were kept as pets. So when he visited our home with Dieph last year, he was quite apprehensive of my big dogs. But gradually Philippe learned to take them on walks and last weekend he pet sat for me at my house with all three of my animals, my dogs, Casey and Taylor, and Domino the cat. Now he loves them and they love him. He now understands what is meant by "pet therapy." And he looks forward to pet sitting again in the future! Philippe has been transformed from being fearful to loving dogs. Science has proven that he will be healthier for it. That helps to make him an even stronger servant for our Lord's kingdom, too.

Dr. Chopra recommends these other transformative practices besides pet therapy:

- **Be passionate about your life and more aware of the ways you experience it. Make new friends. Overcome your fears.**
- **Remain open to as much input as possible. (Remember Robinson's quote: "Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see.")**
- **Don't shut down your heart with judgment, rigid beliefs, and prejudices.**
- **Examine other points of view as if they were your own.**
- **Take responsibility for your choices of food, job, faith, health, and do your best with all of them.**
- **Work on releasing your psychological blocks like shame and guilt; they affect your outlook on the world. (Ash Wednesday is a good time to pray about giving your burdens to God.)**
- **Free yourself emotionally. To be emotionally resilient is the best defense against disease.**

- **Be willing to redefine yourself and renew every day.**
- **Don't regret the past or fear the future. Both bring misery. Live the moments you have left by loving others.**

Be transformed and always transforming for the glory of God. Don't get stuck in rigid judgmental fearful thinking or your body and mind and spirit will suffer. Be like Peter and trust in Jesus enough to be quiet and listen to him. Get to know who you follow so you know how to act like him.

Be kind to yourself, walk outside in nature, pray, serve, and bless others by sharing yourself courageously, and love them like Jesus, so you too can be transformed in the way God meant for you to be. Amen

Benediction: Last Sunday, the day after my Aunt's memorial service, I joined my pastor friends who feed the homeless in Long Beach. I helped greet the people and made an effort to help them find a place to sit with their food. Inside my brain though, I was feeling low about the sad condition of the people, especially the children. Some of the people seemed depressed and grumpy, too. In my mind, my presence didn't seem to be enough to make much of a difference. There were plenty of other good helpers. As I was feeling kind of useless a young black teenager turned around and she looked straight at me on her way out the door. With a loud happy voice she said, "You have the most beautiful smile! You made my day today with your smile!"

That reminded me to be willing to see God in creation in new ways, and let the mysterious transformation unfold according to God's grace.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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