

Old Testament Lesson—Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

New Testament Lesson—Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

I usually try to avoid clichés and platitudes—and for good reason. We all know how they tend to oversimplify whatever’s being addressed.

They roll off the tongue like reflexes. They’re too easy and require no effort. And, let’s be honest, they can be so terribly cringe. At worst, they can be harmful.

“Everything happens for a reason.” “God helps those who help themselves.”

I’m sure you can add a few of your own. We’ve all heard similar things from those with the best of intentions. Bless their hearts.

And however, it could be argued that these oversimplified turns of phrase are so common for a reason, right? I mean, most of them do contain a kernel of truth—even if that truth is really watered down and isn’t particularly helpful in the moment.

Here’s one of those clichés I’ve been thinking about this week...

“God accepts us just as we are. But loves us enough to not leave us as we’re found. God accepts us just as we are. But God loves us enough to not leave us as God found us.”

You've heard that one before, right? Maybe not the worst one in the world—but a cliché all the same. And I'd argue it contains a really big kernel of truth.

Yes (praise the Lord), we are loved unconditionally—loved just as we are. Yes, the Lord accepts us just as we are—as the flawed and messy, sinful human beings that we are.

Yes, it's true. It's also true that God hopes and desires for us to grow—that we seek to learn from our mistakes and repent of our wrongdoings. We're not meant to be spiritually and morally stagnate. We're not meant to be stuck in the same place we were when we took our first steps in the direction of Christ.

No, following Jesus means we go where he goes—even and especially when the most vulnerable are at risk.

Yes, it's true: Even if, over the course of our lives, we failed miserably every time we had the chance to show Christ's love to our neighbor and those in need, we would still be fully immersed in God's grace.

Even if our faith journeys are nothing but a series of false starts, wilderness wanderings, and even if we end up *less* like Jesus than when we first believed, *even then* we are embraced by the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross. For while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Even then, my friends, we've been called and irrevocably claimed by God's love. Ain't nothing we can do about it... We belong to God. Period. End of story.

And yet...we also know God's love is transformative. It's a powerful force that pushes us out of our comfort zones—challenging us to become the truest versions of ourselves—to become not holier *than* thou, but holier *like* Thou—to become more like Christ Jesus.

All prefixes aside, it seems to me the Transfiguration story is really, at its heart, a story about transformation. Here in Luke's gospel, it's not only Jesus, but also his three friends who are changed—never to be the same again.

I mean how could anyone experience the glory of God in Christ—shining like the sun—and not be forever changed? I know it's almost impossible to imagine that kind of direct encounter with the Divine. But Peter, James, and John didn't have to imagine it.

For Peter, James, and John—witnessing their friend and teacher enraptured in light—chatting alongside Moses and Elijah—well, it must've felt like a glimpse of heaven itself.

Being faithful Jews, the three disciples would've known...Moses, the great Deliverer and Lawgiver—Elijah the prophet and herald of God's messiah—for *those* two to show up in this moment—well, Peter and company simply couldn't view Jesus through the same lens anymore.

Up until this moment, perhaps, their teacher was just this ultra-charismatic preacher and healer—one who they thought might be the One Israel was waiting for...

Up until this moment, they thought they just might be walking around the Galilee with God's messiah...Now there was no question about it.

The learned carpenter before them, enveloped in dazzling white alongside two of their greatest heroes—this was the exclamation point Peter needed eight days ago when he had the audacity to claim Jesus was the Messiah of God.

Of course we, Luke's modern audience, know the disciples have a long way to go before they actually get it—before they understood this messiah would shatter their expectations of what a messiah was supposed to be.

We, of course, know God's messiah had come to suffer and die and rise again. We have the luxury of hindsight and two thousand years of interpretation.

But for Peter, James, and John, their journey was just getting started—reignited by the spectacular vision before them—confirmation that they were following the right person.

Perhaps, going forward, they would minister with greater confidence. Perhaps they would try harder every day to be disciples worthy of Israel's messiah. Perhaps they would strive to learn more and heed the divine words coming from the cloud: "Listen to him! Listen to Jesus."

Perhaps they would humble themselves—relinquish worldly goods and aspirations in favor of loving their oppressed neighbors as fiercely as possible. Perhaps they would grow and their faith deepen. Perhaps they might become just a bit more like their Master and have the courage to take up their own cross.

Siblings in Christ: the good news is we don't have to climb a mountain to experience such radical transformation. We don't need the mountaintop to witness the heights of God's grace. And we don't have to witness the extraordinary to know how profoundly loved we are, and to reflect much-needed light into the world.

The good news is we're invited to experience the miraculous at table together. We're invited to experience the transforming power of Holy Communion. We don't just *witness* the extraordinary, my friends, we get to *touch* it! We get to *smell* it. We get to *taste* God's grace—to taste and see that the Lord is good!

You see: what Peter, James, and John didn't know was that what they were fortunate enough to witness was but a foretaste of the greatest miracle still to come: the Resurrection. In the same way, our Communion together is but a foretaste of that heavenly banquet promised to us when our Lord returns to redeem all Creation.

Don't underestimate the power of the sacrament. For whenever we celebrate this sacred meal, we bear witness to the miraculous. We take in God's promises. Our spirits are nourished and our cups are filled.

By Christ's body broken for us, our bodies are transformed for the purpose of building God's kingdom of peace. Our bodies become holy prisms to shine and reflect God's glorious love to all corners of the earth.

By the Lord's Supper, we're assured of our place at the table—loved and accepted just as we are. But by the same token of love, we're reminded of our calling to grow and challenge ourselves—to step out in faith and *do something* with the gifts we've been given.

Because here's the truth: God's miraculous power easily stretches from the mountaintop to the tabletop—unveiling the ways we and the world can be transformed.

And to my queer siblings—especially my transgender and non-binary friends: Please, don't let anyone or anything make you think your specific journeys of self-discovery are anything less than modern-day miracles among us. Don't let anyone convince you that you aren't blessing the world with your presence and God-given talents.

Don't ever believe the sinful lies that aim to suppress your brilliant, glorious light—a light so desperately needed in a dark and stormy world. Never think that becoming who you are isn't fulfilling your authentic calling from God. You are created in God's own image.

Because for me, and I imagine for many of you too—Bearing witness to your gender affirmation, whatever shape that takes, is the greatest of privileges. And, not only that, it's also the closest thing this world can imagine to what Peter, James, and John witnessed long ago. It's the closest thing this world knows to Transfiguration today!

Know that your resilience and resistance is something profoundly holy. Because you belong here. You belong everywhere. And you are cherished—eternally beloved by your Creator.

I want to leave you with these incredibly thoughtful and poignant words written for today. They come from Jenny McDevitt. She pastors a church in Columbia, South Carolina. And she writes this...

In the church world this weekend, many will celebrate Transfiguration Sunday. The story will be told of the time Jesus went up a mountain, and in front of his friends and followers, something in him changed—and he shined so brightly that no one who saw it was ever the same again.

There will be prayers of thanksgiving: that such a shift in all we know—that such a shift in all we think we know—is still possible.

There will be exclamations of hope: that such newness might be something all of us find and experience and recognize.

There will be plenty of reminders about how even if understanding eludes us, we can trust that good news abounds, because that is always the truth wherever God is found.

It will be a celebration tomorrow, of God-given Transfiguration, of holy Transformation.

And those who have ears, let them hear, in case I have been too subtle: you who identify as Transgender, I promise that Jesus will be celebrating you, too—you who are no less a miracle; you who are no less a wonder; you who are no less an essential part of the world so deeply beloved by God.

Because in that Transfiguration story, scripture tells us, a voice from heaven called out: “This is my child, my chosen one.”

So I will spend every breath I have making sure you know that is what God says about you, too. And I will pray until there is no prayer left in me that we will see the day when you don't have to be afraid to shine the truth of yourself from every mountaintop around.

May it be so. Dear God: May it be so. Amen.