February 23rd, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Transfiguration

10:30am

Transforming Light

1. Transfiguration

As we celebrate this Transfiguration Sunday, I’ve been reflecting upon how foreign the word ‘transfiguration’ is in our common vernacular. I don’t know about you, but I don’t go walking around using the word daily, so for me to even begin to write this sermon, I had to wrestle once again with this word – how do we convey this word for us today, something tangible, something explainable, something we can grasp onto as we delve into the word.

Forgive me for using such a simplistic metaphor, but for me, transfiguration is helpful to think about in this way. Transfiguration in the greek is – metamorphosis. When I think about metamorphosis, I think about a transformation, something that evolves, something that will not go back to the way it was before. The easiest thing for me to conceive of is the idea of the caterpillar to butterfly. The butterfly never goes back to caterpillar form – the metamorphosis, the transformation, the change, is distinctive and permanent.

Now, I’m sure that the Church Mothers and Fathers who have deeply studied the roots of the transfiguration might be up there saying, “Really, really, you’re comparing Jesus to a butterfly?” because their explanations are way more nuanced and theological bound up in fancy jargon. But that doesn’t work for me – because the three men up there on that mountain, Peter, James and John experienced something that while prophecied, is so hard to explain to your everyday human.

You see these men running around, almost in a frizzled anxiety panic state, where they think – okay, this is great, we’re going to make homes for you and Elijah and Moses and...that’s something we can do because we don’t know what to do. We don’t know what to make of what’s happening here. This is an override on the senses – from the dazzling light, to the sight before their eyes, to the sounds they are hearing about the beloved Christ.

Jesus has been transfigured, or transformed – where the temporal meets the heavens – Jesus is no longer seen in human form, but irreversibly changed to Jesus the Christ, taking on a different form. And just like the caterpillar to butterfly metaphor – Jesus can’t go back – Jesus can’t turn around from the fate that is in store for him. Things have changed.

And for these men who watch, things have changed for them. They know Christ, but now know Christ in a new way – they can’t go back. They have seen a sight they cannot forget and how they live will forever be oriented by this transformation.

And these moments of transformation happen in our own lives. Perhaps none of us have seen Jesus in a dazzling state on a mountain, but there’s no doubt that we’ve had those moments of transformative light in our own lives where we experience something and we can’t go back to life as usual. There’s a new normal, a new way we live, a new way we orient ourselves. There’s some that come to mind easily – the moment you become a parent, from what I hear – you can’t go back – you will worry about your child no matter if they are 5, 15, or 50. The moment you cross the stage, you are handed that diploma – something changes, all the work that you have invested has now culminated and set you on a new path. There are the hard moments too – the moments you witness someone you love die – how you interpret life and mortality and love change, and while that’s difficult, its also important work in the human soul.

There are all these touchstone moments – moments of change – some beautiful, some hard, some stoic – but all transformative nonetheless. And something tells me that if you are here this morning, you’ve had a transformative moment in choosing to believe in Christ. Again, there’s no expectation that it should be such a sight as these men saw, but I wonder this Sunday if you can remember a moment or a period of time where things changed for you.

You’ve heard my story plenty of times – but it’s worth reiterating – my first recognition of something bigger than me in the world was as I looked out to the ocean. The moment I knew this was God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit – was through the love and formation of people who surrounded me at my home church. The moment I knew I was called to ministry was on a Sunday morning as a youth at a pulpit. Those moments indelibly changed me, and while my faith and ministry has certainly evolved, I wouldn’t be here without those moments.

What are your moments? Some folks would say, ‘what’s your testimony’ – but that’s often bound up in the evangelical world. So, what’s your story? It doesn’t have to be fancy, it doesn’t have to extreme – whatever it is - is already holy and sacred. Take some time this Sunday and this week to think about your transfiguration, the transformative light that you’ve experienced that brings you to sit and listen and sing and pray in the pews today.

1. Lent

As I circle back to our New Testament text this morning, this transfiguration is a sign of a transformation for us in our liturgical year. This Sunday marks the end of Epiphany – a season of revelation and exploration of Christ alive and at work in the world, a season of Magi, a season of awe and reflection and wonder at what baptism means. Today the tide has turned, we move into a new season, where we recognize that Jesus upon the mountain has shared with these men his fate. We turn to the season of Lent.

This Wednesday, we will gather, somber and stoic, at seven pm in this gently lit sanctuary. With the words, ‘ashes to ashes, dust to dust’ we remember our own mortality and the journey that we are setting forth on to witness Christ at the cross. We transform, as we enter this season, faced with scenes that are hard to fathom and words that are difficult to say.

III. Finding Your Transfiguration

The charge and challenge to you remains, as we enter this season of deep reflection, as the tides turn to a new way of knowing Christ, may you prepare yourself for this time by reflecting upon the ways that you have changed. List them. List the ways, again, whether that’s becoming a parent, or a graduate, or sibling – list those moments, see if you can explain or express how your world changed in those moments. List the ways, that are hard – those moments of death, the time you faced a new and difficult normal, the challenges that you thought would break you. All of these changes are significant and holy and sacred – but I wonder if you can add to your list the time when you found Christ, perhaps the time when you felt distant from Christ, find a way to express why you have made it to your pew this morning.

For God has transfigured, for Christ has transformed, and as God’s children - we are called to change and challenge and metamorphosis throughout our lives. And so may the light that shined upon Christ also shine upon you, as you reflect and know God’s great love for you as we move into the Lenten season. Amen.