



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

Well, after seven years of ordination, I've had the privilege to walk alongside more than a few people facing the end of life. And one of the things that has struck me is how so many of them, despite whatever discomfort or pain they might be experiencing, despite whatever fear or disappointment they might be feeling, despite whatever chaos is happening around them, the decisions that need to be made, the medications, the tubes and the machines, the doctors and the nurses hovering, that somehow in the midst of all of that, it is profound to me how so many of them are able to use the time they have left to care for those they will leave behind. When their family and friends come to visit, if they can, they might make it a point to look their best, put on makeup, brush their hair, to put on the best smile that they can. They make a point to ask about our lives. They worry about how we will get along. They urge family members and siblings to make amends and they tell their grandchildren just how proud they are of the person they have become.

I'm guessing some of you have known people like that. People who are struggling. People who are suffering, perhaps even facing death. We come in thinking we're going to care for them, and they end up caring for us. I remember the last time we all got together at my grandmother's house, it was kind of a family reunion. She was always the hub of the family. She was the one that brought us all together for Thanksgiving and the different holidays. But this one would be different. She was alone now, my grandfather had died several years earlier, and she had suffered two bouts with cancer that had taken a terrible toll on her.

My mom picked me up from the airport and on the drive over, she made it pretty clear that this might be the last time we ever got together like this. Well, you would never have known it when she opened the door. My grandmother, she's wearing one of her beautiful, colorful dresses, her signature earrings. She had her charm bracelet on each of these little charms with a story to tell of all its own. She was glowing. I tried to ask how she was feeling, but she only wanted to find out how I was doing, how life was going for me down in San Diego.

And for a brief moment, for a brief period of time, she seemed like the same person I'd known all my life. But as the night wore on, I noticed her energy was fading. By the time it came time for desserts, I saw how she struggled to push the

chair from the table. We helped her to her feet. We kissed her goodnight, took her to bed. And while she missed dessert, it didn't take long for us to find hidden in her refrigerator her famous apple crumble that she had made for us probably the day before. Looking back, we had all come from far and wide to care for her, but she was doing everything she could to care for us, and I can't remember a time when she was more radiant.

So what might this have to do with the Transfiguration? One of the epic iconic moments in scripture, one that can feel like it belongs on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel much more than it does in my modest life, much less my grandmother's kitchen. Well, I'm not the first preacher to notice that the Transfiguration happens right after Jesus has shared some terrible news with his friends – that this movement, he began, that's been gaining such a momentum, that's been miraculously healing the sick and feeding thousands, that this movement that they started that is giving them all so much hope is not going to end the way they think. Jesus has just told them that He will instead be betrayed and undergo terrible suffering and death.

And they receive the news just in the same way that we might. They go right into the stages of grief – anger, denial. Peter famously says, no way, not on my watch. Ain't gonna happen. To which Jesus equally famously says, get behind me, Satan. You're not getting it, He says. You're still focused on earthly things. My life, it's not about trying to live as long as possible. You're still using the old scorecards. For me, it's not about long life. It's about giving the world new life. And for that, I will need to die.

And it's clear they still don't get it or perhaps don't believe it. So Jesus takes them up the mountain to show them, not to tell them, but to show them the radiance of God's glory so that there would be no doubt. It's been suggested that maybe this is Jesus trying to care for his friends, knowing that they will soon see Him arrested, dragged through the streets, humiliated and tortured. Perhaps this is His way of letting them know it's going to be all right, that they're going to be all right. So He gives them a glimpse of Him at His best, a glimpse of the resurrection so that they might not fear. Rather than despair or be angry, perhaps Jesus is transfiguring Himself just as some of our own family members have done for us, using the time He has to care for His friends and to show them that no matter what happens, all will be well.

And while I love that take, I would add that I think the Transfiguration is more than just a preview of the resurrection. Jesus is also paving the path for us to follow. By revealing the glory of God, the Transfiguration invites us to put down our own fears so that we might do what God is telling us today: listen to Him and follow Him. The Episcopal priest and modern day mystic, Cynthia Bourgeault suggests that overcoming fear is the eye of the needle in the life of faith, because everything to her, everything that is worthy and abiding, everything that is

life-giving and generative, everything passes and happens once we get through that eye and begin to live on the other side of our fears, even the fear of death.

As Jesus tells the disciples again, just before taking them up the mountain, those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who are willing to lose their life, for my sake will save it. And so the Transfiguration is more than just a preview. It is also pointing us to the path. Jesus is inviting us to live our lives on the other side of our fears, even the fear of death, to die before we die, so that we might truly live. That's the way of the Cross, the path of suffering, which leads to the death of all the earthly things we cling to, all the things that are not of God, so that we might follow His Son.

Dying before we die means to die to our pride and our ego, to our need for approval, and to our false appearances and all the pressure that comes with them to live a perfectly Photoshopped life. Dying before we die means to die to our addictions and our distractions, and all the false idols that keep us looking for love and acceptance in all the wrong places. It means to die to our resentments so that we can start loving and to die to our regrets so that we can start living. The path of Jesus is to begin letting go of all those things so that we might truly begin to live. Live a life that radiates love and lets the glory of God shine through us, no matter what might be happening to us, no matter what the world might try to throw at us.

Transfiguration isn't about adding something new that isn't there already. It's not about fixing us or necessarily even changing us. Transfiguration is about seeing what is already there in a new light, Transfiguration happens when we discover the Christ within us, which allows us to see the Christ in the other. I wonder what would happen if you and I, with God's help, allow the light of Christ to try and transfigure us.

Do you believe that God has that power? Do you believe that that potential is within you? We've seen others do it, have we not? Perhaps even those facing death. And if it's in them, it's in you. Because we all share. We all have the image of God within us. All of us have the glory of God within us just waiting to shine through. How might we, rather than despair and complain in the face of suffering when others around us are filled with impatience and judgment, how might we radiate God's peace?

When our family members are filled with gossip, when our friends are constantly having grievances about one group or another, how might we let God's grace shine through? When people let us down, when we get thrown under the bus, when others are retaliating and they're telling us we should as well, how might we radiate God's endless forgiveness? When those around us denigrate the poor, the outsider, when we see people scapegoat, those who are different, and so one division after another, how might we speak up and stand up for those who can't

and use our power and our privilege so that God's unconditional love might shine through?

And whenever we are told, or whenever we tell ourselves that we are somehow not good enough, that we don't measure up, that we don't belong and aren't deserving of love, how can we get with other believers so that together God's light might shine so bright that we can't help but see those doubts to be the lies they've always been.

The message of the Transfiguration that I am hearing loud and clear today is we don't have to wait. We don't have to wait until the end of our lives to experience the power of God's love to transfigure us now. It can happen today because the Christ who took the disciples up the mountain, that same Christ is beside you even now, giving you courage when you need it, giving you guidance when you're lost, keeping you steady when you falter, and ready to catch you when you fall.

As we approach Ash Wednesday next week, as we prepare to come face to face with our own mortality, once more, what if we were to embrace it? What if we were to see death not as an end, but just another Transfiguration? How might that free us to die before we die so that we might truly live? How can we be transfigured today so that together we might change and transform the world tomorrow?

Amen.