

Sermon Manuscript

“Transfiguration.”

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Westwood First Presbyterian Church

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Sermon Manuscript:

When I was 37 years old, I went to my doctor at the time for a physical. The doctor had become a good friend of mine over the years and knew the line of work that I was in. After the physical, he sat me down and asked a question: “How do you want to live the 2nd half of your life?” I was kind of taken aback, but he went on to say that even though I was active, my lifestyle of being in ministry with students and families at the time wasn’t consistently active. Plus, I had a lot of lunch meetings and pizza parties so my diet wasn’t that great. My vitals were fine but my energy level sometimes flattened out. However, the doctor told me that if I kept leading my life the way that I was, things may change quicker than I would want. I took that as a wake-up call for change.

My spouse, Debbie, was a runner at the time and I began to think that maybe something I should do more consistently. I hated running in high school, I went out for the soccer team and track teams and didn’t stick with them because they both involved so much running! (You’d think that I would know that before I went out for those sports). But, I had other things on my mind in high school besides running. Which is ironic considering that I coached Finneytown’s Cross Country team for 9 years and helped with the track team several years ago.

But, 20 years ago, I thought that if Deb could run, I could as well. I started out slow, then built up my endurance and confidence, and found myself enjoying it. I also changed my diet and I found that I had more energy and that my body was changing.

Not only did I find confidence in my running, but in all of my life. The running coincided with a new course in my life of wanting to understand more about me and how I relate to others. I wanted to grow and I knew that I needed other coaches, friends in my life that I could journey with. It was about that time that I began working with a spiritual director and also starting an accountability group, as well as jumping into a clergy cohort that I still meet with.

Years later, I had another “second half of life” moment that was more than the physical and relational changes. This change was deeper as it required my life to die that I had lived in order for something new to emerge within me. Coming around the time of my best friend’s death of suicide, then my parent’s death, my dad in a car wreck and my mom with cancer a few years later, I knew that those deaths and other, more metaphorical

deaths in my life, something was changing within me. Those deaths were disruptive and opened up a deeper longing within me to know myself, my true self, not the roles that I lived or the image I projected...or even the ego that I had constructed over a lifetime.

I was changing, for the better in many ways even through the hard and painful things. I believe that life is always giving us opportunities for growth, but different times in our lives present unique opportunities for us to grow, to be transfigured if you will...which is what this morning's gospel lesson is about, the story of Jesus' transfiguration.

The story takes up 6 days after a series of events where Jesus is going around sharing the good news of God's Presence, a message that was about bringing about much anticipated change. At one point in previous stories, Jesus is asking what others were saying about him. Some said that he was Elijah, John the Baptist. Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah though...Jesus had also healed some folks, one story right before this was a healing from blindness, which also symbolizes humanity's blindness and the need for the divine touch of another. He's also beginning to share some hard things about his own suffering that was soon to come, that he would experience deep pain, and that he would die and rise again. Crowds were following him, I'm sure it was hard for them to understand, and even harder for Jesus to convey this message.

Then we come to today's passage where Jesus is getting away from the crowds, as he often did. He went up to a mountain with three of his friends. Kind of like a scout hike I'd imagine...a walk in the wilderness with some good friends.

The disciples were good guys I'm sure, but not always on top of things, and they had some serious issues, as we all do. Peter was anxiety ridden and prone to making big statements, only to not be able to back them up. He denied even knowing Jesus during his darkest hour a short time later. James and John were concerned with greatness and arguing about who would sit where in eternity. They seemed to be way more concerned by another life other than the one they were living. They seemed consumed with theological discussions and fantasies on power rather than helping those around them. Jesus had a few words for the how the disciples were to be servants at their expense a while later as well. Yet, through it all, through their anxieties, image issues, and failures, Jesus counted them as friends and believed in them. He invited them into events and life experiences with him that were transformative and meaningful.

This event, this mountain top experience had a profound impact on the Peter, James, and John. They saw before them Jesus, their friend, changed, transfigured, beautiful and even glowing. How did they react? Well, they were overwhelmed, but they were glad to be there, they knew they wanted to be there. Peter was so caught up in the moment, that he wanted to create three dwellings or set up tents for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. Somehow

he wanted to contain that moment. He was terrified, as they all were. They didn't know where to go or what to do, yet, they knew that things had changed.

Then, the clouds came. Maybe that's to say that things aren't always clear, they become cloudy or foggy. Yet, even in the fog, God says, this is my son, part of me, I love him, LISTEN to him.

When they left the mountain, notice that Jesus is with them. He's not distant. He walks from the mountaintop experience down to the valley below. Jesus told them not to tell anyone, they don't have to validate themselves, just wait, there's more to the story. Jesus would die, but he'd rise again.

Friends, I think that this story has a lot to say about us as persons and as a congregation gathered this day, whether we are WFPC members, visitors, or scout members. We are being changed, all of us. We experience change throughout our lives. It's inevitable. Sometimes that change can be terrifying. It can be confusing and also exciting, and even cloudy and uncertain. We know we want change and need it. When it comes, we're not sure how to respond or the way for us may not be clear. But God says that we are not alone, that God is with us, going through change with us, and to listen to God's son and to know that Jesus represents us and that we are beloved... This Jesus is also rising up within us. He is alive and is working in and through us, calling us to have confidence in ourselves as his friends.

We are connected to the Son, Christ lives in us and his Spirit is moving all around us. I sense that in this church, the Scouting community, and this neighborhood.

Friends, I believe that Westwood First, and the Scouts, this neighborhood, are going through a transfiguration. We are being changed into something beautiful. We are inviting in conversation partners within the congregation and community to help us see through the clouds of what that change will bring, we are practicing listening skills to each other, our community, and the word of God. I know I'm listening.

I want to see this church filled with people of all sorts of ages, color, economic backgrounds, thoughts, beliefs. Folks all being called to live life together in the way of Jesus and folks seeking out a Jesus who is pursuing them. I hope to see all of us living into Christ as lived into by Jesus who was changed before the eyes of his disciples where they could see him in even deeper ways. It will take time, hard work, and some suffering, but it will also be dazzling, encouraging, and wonderful.

Friends, it's good to be with you as we go to the mountaintop together, and back down into the valley...hear God's voice telling us, I love you, I'm with you, I am present...and calling us into Presence with ourselves, one another, the Divine as we are all transfigured.

And, remember again that Jesus came off the mountaintop of transfiguration with the disciples...Scouts, Westwood First, this community, all of us, together, are being called into life together. We will change as we work even closer together and share life together. Amen?