

Chris Murphy
February 11, 2024
Scripture: Matthew 17: 1-8
Sermon Title: Transforming Grace

Prayer...

Introduction:

Transfiguration Sunday is a fitting day to conclude our sermon series on grace. One question I am asking these days is what were the experiences that contributed to the spiritual formation of Jesus.

Certainly, meeting Moses and Elijah on a mountain and experiencing the Glory of God would be one of those experiences that shaped Jesus.

Hearing the words, this is my beloved son would also bless Jesus and prepare him for the upcoming challenge of the cross. The

transfiguration for Jesus was an experience of grace. It was a gift of

God's love that helped shape Jesus more into the likeness of His Father in Heaven.

In a similar way, our life experiences- our spiritual highs and lows have a way of forming us through the power of grace. Before I explore more deeply the idea of transforming grace, I want to remind you that two weeks ago we talked about original grace. Original grace is the beautiful truth that every human being has the light of Christ and that what is deepest in every person and all of creation is the sacred presence of the divine. Our deepest nature is therefore good and loving. Our true self is love. You are love because you are created in God's image.

Last week I spoke about forgiving grace, which is the grace we are most familiar with from our Christian heritage. This is the teaching that God's love and favor is not based on our works but purely on God's goodness. We live with a sinful condition and therefore we rely on the grace of forgiveness from God and others. We are not perfect. We do sin and therefore we need forgiveness and we need a Savior to help us in our weakness be restored to our true nature of love and goodness.

The topic today of transforming grace answers the question about the goal of grace and the goal of life itself. We are to learn to receive and give love. To put it simply, the goal of our lives is to grow in love. We are to grow in our experience of grace and love. We are to experience more fully our love for God, ourselves, and others. The goal is to embody love in its fullness. If you ask me to describe a person who is spiritually mature, I would say that such a person would be like Jesus. She or he would embody love and grace to the world.

Another way to talk about transforming grace is spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is often a slow process, but formation has to do with deepening our love relationship with God and becoming more like Jesus in the process. So how do we become transformed by grace? How do we grow in Christ-likeness and deepen our love experience with God?

Whenever I think of transforming grace and spiritual formation, I recall studying the writings of Christian Spirituality writer Henri Nouwen. One particular memory, I have was reading an article from Nouwen in which

he describes Jesus' rhythm of life that includes moving from solitude to community to ministry.

Nouwen understood that Jesus himself was transformed by his way of life and that Jesus also models the way all human beings may grow in love and grace. So let me remind us of these three keys of being formed into the likeness of Jesus.

Solitude: Let us begin with solitude. Solitude is the spiritual practice of taking time by oneself to meet with God. It can happen during the morning with a cup of coffee as you pet your cat- if you have a cat. It can happen when you take a walk in nature. Here at our church we enjoy First Friday Prayer Retreats, that include two hours of solitude for prayer and reflection on Scripture.

(Share experience in the labyrinth with Toby and Lisa- the Grace of Glory. Share other insights from the group that day)

Community- In addition to solitude with God, what helps transform us by grace is the gift of community. This may be the main reason Jesus had disciples and we know after his resurrection Jesus helped initiate the start of the Christian community. Why is community important for our transformation? If the goal of our lives is to grow in love, it is important that we demonstrate love in tangible relationships. We need each other on the journey of life. We cannot be loving people without acting on love by caring for one another. Community includes our family members, our closest friends, our church community, and other relationships at work, in our neighborhoods and really anyone whom we share life with in an intentional way. I know in our broader culture, today is SuperBowl Sunday where many people will experience a form of community while eating pizza and cheering on their team of choice. That's one way to build community. By the way the two quarterbacks for the Super Bowl this year are Patrick Mahomes of the Kansas City Chiefs and Brock Purdy of the San Francisco 49ers. They both are strong

Christians, so whichever quarterback wins this game will likely give thanks to God during the postgame interviews, which will be nice.

However we choose to grow in community, we need to remember that to grow in love and to become more like Jesus requires a strong supportive group of people in our lives. It is important that much of the community we keep, many of our key relationships need to be safe people who love us well. Jesus had his community of disciples, but he seemed to especially rely on Peter, James, John, Mary Magdalene, and Mary his mom. Who are the key people in your life that uplift you? Our community might also include people who stretch us and require sacrificial love, but today I want to remind you to form friendships that feed your soul. Find people in your life who will believe in you and break bread together with them. Have fun with them. Enjoy life and experience the gift of community.

Ministry- The third way we grow in transforming grace is through ministry. Ministry or mission is our outreach to others in need. Our

vocation is one expression of mission, such as the work of a nurse, teacher, or business leader. But ministry also refers to bringing soup to a neighbor who is sick or joining in a prayer vigil or peaceful march for a social justice cause like equality for all people or stewardship of God's creation. During February we remember Black History month and the need for our mission as Christians to include racial justice and peace making efforts. Mission includes sharing the message of Jesus in word and doing actions in the name of Christ like helping provide clean water in places where greater development work is needed. One of my attractions to becoming a pastor was the reality that I knew working as a pastor would help me put my faith into action. I knew that I liked people and I had a heart for people who suffer both economically, socially, and spiritually. Serving a church has felt like a good fit for me to use my ministry heart. For all of us who regularly attend and join churches, we do so in order to join in the mission of Christ in our world.

What we learn is that as we give, we also receive. The very act of service and ministry changes our lives and makes us more loving. One reminder though with ministry is that like any form of service, if we give without taking time for solitude and community, we will burnout and grow in resentment rather than love, so this is why the flow from solitude to community to ministry back to solitude community and ministry is so important.

In the end what helps us be transformed by grace is Jesus himself. Our relationship with Creator God, Jesus, Holy Spirit is what helps us become who we are created to be.

I hope as you hear this message it feels grace filled. The journey of being transformed by grace is life giving. It is not performance based. God expects that we will make mistakes. In the kingdom of God there are no perfectionists. There are people who are healing from perfectionism, but God is less interested in you being perfect and more interested in you being yourself, with your strengths and flaws. God

sees your beauty, your inherent goodness. Jesus offers you forgiving grace. Holy Spirit transforms you sometimes slowly as you learn to listen to Jesus and experience the glory of God sometimes in mountaintop moments, sometimes in the day to day struggles of life when it feels hard to get out of bed. In the end our transformation is a work of grace.

As I ponder our journey to be more like Jesus, I am reminded that it is tempting to feel like we have to be Jesus. In some ways, we are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, but my spiritual director once told me to be careful to not try to be Jesus too much. We call this a martyrdom complex and it is usually why pastors, missionaries, and other servant hearted people burn out. My spiritual director said when we choose to put ourselves on the cross with Jesus, Jesus is likely to tell us it is too crowded on this cross. Jesus will say to us, you need to let me be your Savior. Friends, we do not need to be our own Saviors. Jesus has got that covered.

(Story of Chosen Actor- John Roumie- new documentary Jonathan and Jesus)

Introduce Lent and Ash Wednesday.

This week friends we will enter as Christian community the season of Lent. We will begin with our Ash Wednesday service on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14th. It is fitting to start Lent on a day dedicated to love. The book we will use during Lent is The Rebirthing of God by John Philip Newell. You may wish to purchase this book, so that you can read along during Lent as I preach on the topics of the books, which relate to wisdom from Celtic Spirituality. May this season of Lent be an opportunity for us to grow in the spiritual practices of solitude, community, and ministry. May this be a season of growing in love and experiencing the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. To God be the glory. AMEN.

Matthew 17:1-8

The Transfiguration

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