

“Becoming”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
February 26, 2017**

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 24:1-6

New Testament lesson: Matthew 17:1-9

“Just wondering ... what happened to wondering?” That was the Facebook post of my neighbor Ginnie Miller. “Back in the day,” she continued, “people could have vibrant conversations about things they wondered. Today, we just Google it, and no more wonder ..., some know it all spoils the fun! Will kids learn to dream?” she asks. “Be lost in thought? Develop a sense of awe or wonder?” To which I replied, “Amen,” with a winky-face emoji.

My point was that church – Amen – is the place where we learn to wonder, church is the place where we are struck by awe at the realization of just how great is our God.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Have you ever wondered about that – the transfiguration of the Lord? Or about what Jesus says on the way down the mountain – “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

What does it mean to us that Jesus appeared transfigured – physically changed – right before our eyes, thanks to the witness of Peter, James and John? What does it mean that Jesus is now raised from the dead, in the glory of God? Two things. It means that those who are in Christ – those who are followers of Jesus – can and will also be transfigured, changed, for the glory of God, here and now.

And that this is something we are to tell, about, to make known, to share with all the world. “Tell no one ... until after the Son of Man has been raised....” Well he has been raised, and we have been set free to tell –to show- the world that our lives have been and are being changed because of Jesus.

If that statement leaves you wondering whether or not your life has been changed because of Jesus, then this sermon will be of particular interest to you. In this sermon we will look at three ways to tap into the changes – the new life, the new possibilities – available to you as a follower of Jesus.

First, follow your bliss. Have you ever heard that phrase before – follow your bliss? It means find a way to do what lights you up inside. When we live into our calling, Christ’s light shines upon us and through us. But how do we discover our calling? Jesus. “Jesus ... led them up a high mountain....” The mountain, in Bible-speak, is where we are closest to God, where we are touched by God.

And changed, changed for the glory of God. The mountaintop experience is where we are shown by God what we are called to be and to do – what is our bliss. The birth of a child, the death of a loved one, any life-changing event like getting married, starting a new career, going on a mission trip or the Estes Park Youth Summit... These are all times and places in life where one can encounter God in such a way as to be transfigured – changed.

The problem is, mountaintop experiences don't last. We come down the mountain as the experience fades, and we're right back where we started. Thankfully, Jesus points to a way we can stay focused on the mountaintop even amid the valleys of life. Accountability partners.

Accountability partners are the second way we tap into the new life and new possibility God would have for us. Once we step into the joy – and the challenge – of following our bliss, we need accountability partners to keep us from slipping back. We see this in the transfiguration of Jesus, where it says, "Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with (Jesus)."

Obviously, Jesus doesn't need Moses and Elijah to hold him accountable, to help him stay true to his calling. For Jesus, they're more like continuity partners – two Biblical figures who represent the law of God (Moses) and the prophets of the Lord (Elijah), showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets.

But the point is the same. For us to maintain a connection to our bliss – our calling in life – we need people around us to be supportive, to lift us up. If you don't have someone in your life who knows and supports your calling as a follower of Jesus, a child of God, find someone. Find someone you can trust and tell that person how God has changed your life, and what that means to you, to your future, your hopes and dreams.

It is in that conversation that you will once again be shown a pathway forward toward your bliss, your calling. And by sharing it with another human being – someone you can go back to from time to time – you are empowered to live into that calling, whatever it is – being a great parent, spouse, brother or sister, aunt or uncle; serving your community in a way that changes it for the better; finding a job that lights you up inside; giving of yourself for the sake of others; whatever it is that God is calling you to live into.

Follow your bliss, and have accountability partners. This brings us the third way that we step into and maintain the changes in life that God would have for us: that being the discipline to keep moving forward. Peter, up on that mountain with Jesus – after seeing how God shines in and through Jesus – Peter says, "If you (want), I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." And we can just stay here for the rest of our lives.

But Jesus does not want that. Jesus knows that those who are following their true calling in life never stop, never stand still. They develop the discipline and practices that keep them moving forward.

Even here at First Church, the temptation is to settle in and get comfortable, and stay that way. But our calling is to continually move forward – to find new and innovative ways to be the community of faith God is calling us to be, to become.

Now of course, continually moving forward can be a little disconcerting. It's not easy adjusting to change. But if we hang together and focus on Christ, we can do it – together. Take for instance our worship music. When we went to one service, the vision was one praise song, one blended song (like Amazing Grace set to a contemporary arrangement), and one traditional hymn.

As great as that's been, there's no doubt the balance has been heavy on praise music, which is not everyone's preferred style. So we are going to be alternating back and forth each week; This is so everyone has their heart music more prominent in worship from time to time. One praise song, two hymns one week; two praise songs and one hymn the next.

Another change here in worship is having the children stay in the sanctuary with us once a month, to be in worship and maybe learn a bit more about church. They're back there by the usher. We're not the first church to try this. The story goes, at the first church to try this, 6-year-old Angie was sitting with her 4-year old brother Joel, who was giggling, singing and talking out loud. Finally, his big sister whispered to him, "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" And with that, Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two people standing by the door? Those are hushers."

The point is, change is not easy. But if Jesus shows us anything it's that we are meant to change, and to be changed, by God; changed as we grow as a community of faith, as individuals, as a nation.

On Wednesday, we enter into the season of Lent. Lent is a time to consider who we really are, and what about us gets in the way of the world truly seeing it – our true calling, lived out boldly and gloriously, and graciously. There will be a time during our Ash Wednesday service this week to consider something you regret, and maybe something in particular that's holding you back in life.

Maybe you never took the time to consider what is your bliss, what is your calling. It's not too late. Set aside that regret and look anew for where God is calling you today, tomorrow. Maybe you got a sense of your true calling is, but then lost touch with it. Get present to that again, by praying about, your sense of call with someone, who can be an accountability partner, someone to help you move forward.

Maybe you got stuck along the way in following your bliss; got comfortable and decided to stay put, to stop moving forward. Take on a discipline or practice – spiritual and/or physical – that can reenergize you, get you moving again.

This change business – the transformation that we undergo in Christ – is not easy. But neither is being stuck. Thank God that Jesus is here for us – for you – to comfort us, protect us, and most importantly, to lead us forward. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

O God of radiance and light, we long to be people who live and walk in the light of your glory. As joyous as that is, sometimes we're just not feeling it. We find ourselves in darkness or fear, wandering aimlessly through life rather than focused on where you are leading us.

Help us to trust the light that you shine into our lives, and to follow that light to become fuller expressions of who Christ calls us to be.

We thank you, God, for sending us the light of your son. Let your light shine in us so that our faces reflect your light and love to all those who don't yet know your saving grace, your transformative power, your reassuring and inspirational presence.

We pray your comfort on those who grieve the loss of a loved one.
We pray your provision for those who go without, and for us, the presence of mind and the joy of heart in giving where we are able.

For in you, O Lord, we are changed for the better, that all creation might better reflect your glory.

As we lift up the prayer that Jesus taught us, let us be mindful of the transformational power of those words, spoken to you in the Spirit and the Power of Christ, as he taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**