

Love Never Ends: Being the Body of Christ

Epiphany comes from the Greek and can be translated as “the light shines forth” or simply, “the light shines.” It refers to the manifestation of some light, which could be knowledge, or understanding, or even relationship. The magi as the symbol represent the world that comes to see something of significance in the baby in Bethlehem, even when many of those closest don’t see it.

Ordinary time is the season that follows Epiphany, although most of the time we call it the “season after Epiphany.” In Year C of the lectionary cycle, the Epistle readings for this Ordinary Time are the Letters to the Corinthians. Perhaps the best-known passage, or best-loved passage from I Corinthians is chapter 13, the famous “love chapter.” We built this series on the Epistle readings as a way of seeing the light of Christ through the lens of love. “Love Never Ends” is both a description and a promise. You are invited to journey with us, guided by the Corinthian epistles to let the light shine around you, and in you, and then from you as we seek to continue to become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We who have seen the light of Christ now desire to reflect it in our community and in our world by letting others see Christ through our loving presence.

Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord – Well Pleased

January 9, 2022 – [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

Color: White or Gold

INTRODUCTION

Epiphany is on January 6, so last Thursday. Some will push the date forward and celebrate the Epiphany on January 2, the first Sunday of the new calendar year. We, however, took the route of pushing it back to this Sunday. We are looking at a combined Epiphany/Baptism of the Lord Sunday. If you are used to letting the magi of Matthew's Gospel serve as the primary Epiphany image, then it might be difficult (but not impossible) to wedge magi and baptism into one service. Perhaps the descending dove, the opening of heaven—like clouds parting after a storm and the light shining through—might be images to shape worship around this time.

Epiphany is about the revealing of the light to the world. Not all see it, of course; this is why Jesus frequently said, "let those who have ears to hear, hear." Even we have moments where we aren't so sure that we have seen that light. Yet, we who gather for worship have caught a glimpse of something, and we come to celebrate and to lean into that hope. What we have come to understand is that we are to be the light, so that others might see in us the light of Christ. We might, then, acknowledge the light we have seen in one another and give God thanks for that vision in the darkness.

Our worship should continue to seek the light, to ask God to reveal God's self to us in unmistakable ways. Maybe we could enter the space in relative darkness, if that is possible in your setting, and then gradually keep adding all kinds of light to brighten the space until all are visible and bathed in the light that is Christ. We can sing about the light; we can pray for the light; we can fill our worship space with light of different kinds and colors to remind ourselves that God can be seen in a kaleidoscope of ways.

And in that baptism of light, we can hear the words of blessing that Jesus heard and know that we are pleasing to God. Let there be blessings given and received as we remember our baptism together, even as we commemorate Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river. A common theme throughout this series will be that

individuals matter. Today, we hear the words that remind us that we matter to God. What better blessing can we receive than that?

PREACHING NOTES

This is the First Sunday after Epiphany, which means that the story is about the baptism of Jesus. This is the second of the three epiphanies that border this liturgical season. We begin on Epiphany with the wise men who saw the star. They were given an epiphany, a revelation about who this child really was – not the son of a poor girl and her husband who couldn't find a room in the inn, but the savior of the world.

The first Sunday of the season and the last Sunday after Epiphany contain two revelations that also identify Jesus as God's Son. We begin with the baptism and then we end with the transfiguration, that misty mountaintop experience.

What is interesting about Luke's depiction of the event is that the baptism hardly figures in at all. The verses we skip serve to usher John the Baptist off the stage in favor of Jesus, who now begins his ministry. But after John's bluster, the next thing we know is that the baptism had already taken place. We missed it. Ain't that always the way? We come for the show, and by the time we got our seats, it had already happened. "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus had also been baptized . . ." Darn it!

You'd think that if Luke had a clue about the centuries of struggle the church has had about the detail of baptism, he might have spent a little more time with it. We don't know if Jesus was immersed or sprinkled. We don't know which liturgy John prefers, or if the vows that Jesus made were the same as the ones we make or not. We don't know if John was properly credentialed or if Jesus followed the rules. We don't know who signed the certificate. We need to know these things, don't we?

Luke doesn't seem to think so. "Jesus had also been baptized . . ." That's the sum total of the description here. If Luke is saying that the methodology isn't what is important, then what is? Why is Jesus even there in the first place? That's the question that has puzzled biblical scholars since the beginnings of the church.

John was preaching a baptism of repentance. But we know that Jesus was without sin. So, why would he need to be there? What's going on here?

The other interesting thing is that the next verses in Luke's third chapter are the genealogy of Jesus. Since the Gospel writers never do anything for the heck of it, we have to ask why is the list of Jesus' earthly family tree following the story of his being claimed by his heavenly father?

Here is the leap I'm asking you to make with me this weekend: Jesus went to John to be baptized because he was entering into this messy world that we live in. All of us are born into a world not of our making – a world we can barely understand at the best of times, a world we cannot explain at the worst of times, a world that needs repentance, which is a corporate need as much as an individual one. Jesus strode into the river to be buried up to the neck in the sin of the world, and then to rise to the Spirit. He didn't approve of the brokenness of this world, but he embraced it; he made it his, and he carried it with him, like a chip on the shoulder, like a pack on his back; he carried it all the way to the cross.

And what did he say, when he embraced all that is wrong in this life, all that is less than divine, less than holy? What words did he use to give meaning and understanding and explanation? He didn't say a thing. Like us, he was silent. Did he want to speak? Or was the weight of the burden he accepted so heavy that even he was struck dumb? Like us, he was silent. So that he would know what we experience when we have no words to say in the face of death or worse.

There were words spoken in that moment, though. Words that echo in the silence of our moments even to this day. They weren't his words or ours or any human words. They were God's words, and they said simply, "I love you." They were words of affirmation, not for deeds done or not done, but for being—just for being." I love you" – words to hear in the midst of darkness, words to cling to in the midst of doubt. In the maelstrom of living and of dying, we hear and then—by grace—speak these words; they are all we have: "I love you."

Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Varieties of Gifts

Jan 16, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

“Love never ends” is the guiding theme for the whole series, but it is manifest in a variety of ways through these texts from I Corinthians. We begin this week with an emphasis on giftedness. God’s love for us is shown in the work that we do and in the gifts that we use. But not just in the doing itself, we see God’s love in the way service builds relationships and then those relationships create community.

Here is a chance to re-emphasize spiritual gifts, to launch a process whereby members of the church take some time to discern what gifts are present in the life of the congregation. Then ask, “How can we find ways to use these gifts for the benefit of the whole?” Maybe there would be space for testimony from those who have discovered their spiritual gifts and how they have been in service to the unity of the body, or the growth in discipleship, or the building of bridges into the wider community. Find ways to encourage others in the congregation to also be willing to be in service to the whole in new and transforming ways.

Above all, we ask for God to help us discern how God is at work in and around us as we worship and work. Our prayers are for wisdom and discernment and for the unity of the body. If there is polarization or conflict, pray for ways to overcome that which divides the body. It may seem impossible, yet there is power in the body praying together for a common vision. Sing songs of unity and of giftedness to proclaim this power of vision and of hope in the life of the congregation. Be open to the movement of the Spirit in individuals and in community as you gather in person or online to be the body of Christ at work in the world.

PREACHING NOTES

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed” (12:1). We turn to the epistles to the Corinthians for the rest of this series. Most folks know of the letters, even if they don’t know everything that they contain. In a couple of weeks, we’ll come to the most famous and beloved

chapter of the epistle, so there will be recognition. But some reminders of the source of these letters would be useful because there will be recognition.

Corinth was called “Sin City” in its day. There was so much going on there that it would be hard to capture in an introductory way. Suffice it to say that it was hard to be a follower of Jesus in a city like that. It was hard to maintain purity, hard to stay out of the dog-eat-dog business of the surrounding community. It was so hard, in fact, that the ethos of the surrounding area leaked into the church. These letters (and scholars believe that there were so many letters burning up the postal routes between wherever Paul happened to be and the church in Corinth) were written to address issues in the church. This series won’t go into all the issues but will certainly focus on the central problem, at least from Paul’s perspective: disunity.

We’ll come back to it again and again in this series. It is the core of the issues that are facing the church in Corinth and, we might suspect, in the United Methodist Church and every church today. This week, we consider giftedness, but from the perspective of creating unity. “There are varieties . . . but the same” is the formula Paul uses to talk about this subject: Diversity in unity. Individuality for the cause of oneness. I don’t believe Paul would suggest that the individual doesn’t matter or is somehow subsumed into the whole, but he would argue that love as the motivating power of giftedness means that we seek to serve others, to be in relationship. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (12:7). Discipleship grows in relationship. We are gifted in our variety of ways, he argues, so that we can be united by the Spirit and joined together to work for transformation of ourselves, of our community, and of the world.

Gifts, services, activities: are these the same things, just with different names? Are they different ways of talking about a common experience? One of the problems in the church at Corinth was the feeling of superiority among a few. Some have taken to calling those who feel superior “super-Christians.” Paul could be trying to level the playing field in response to those who hold themselves above others because of the kinds of gift they display. And no doubt, like now, there are those who think they don’t have any particular gift of the Spirit. But they engage in activities, says Paul; they provide service. It is all motivated by the Spirit. The grandest and most jaw-dropping action and the simplest, most modest

acts are all part of building up the community and are all empowered by the Spirit.

What is going on at the beginning of the text? It is a bit puzzling and has led to a variety of interpretations. As the preacher, you can decide if it is worth unpacking or whether you want to stick to the main thrust of the text, which is unity. If you skip over it, however, someone is bound to ask. It is possible that part of what Paul is doing here is trying to remind those “super Christians” that they started somewhere too and that they did not become the representatives of the faith that they believe they are on their own power. Even the very beginning of their faith journey or discipleship path was supported, empowered, even made possible by the Spirit. It isn’t them; it isn’t something special about their own abilities or strengths or knowledge. Even the extremely basic understanding that “Jesus Christ is Lord” comes at the prompting of the Spirit.

We think we got there on our own. We think we have wrestled this faith thing into place by our goodness or our efforts or abilities that have gotten us this far on the path. And certainly, we are called to work out our own salvation; we are called to expend effort to grow in faith. But we are aided all along the way. Like an Olympic record with an asterisk because of wind assist, we have a Spirit behind us, or within us, enabling us to move forward, to grow.

But Paul doesn’t leave it there. He must include the negative. “No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’” (12:3). Some wonder if there is a counterforce out there in the Corinthian community, actively working against the new Christian movement, and this is their catchphrase. Perhaps, but it seems more likely that Paul is saying the Spirit is about unity; the Spirit is about building up the body; the Spirit is about let Christ and Christ’s example lead at all times. If you, by contrast, are the cause of division, you are cursing Christ and therefore not speaking by the Spirit. It is a cautionary word.

But what about the gifts? Would it be helpful to run through Paul’s list and identify in the minds and hearts of the congregation what kinds of things we can be gifted with? The varieties of gifts, since that is the title for this week? Perhaps that might be useful. You could talk about wisdom and knowledge and faith as the first tier of gifts in this taxonomy. Then you could notice the more “flamboyant” gifts of healing and miracles, prophecy and discernment of spirits. Then notice

that Paul puts speaking in tongues at the bottom of the list, because it was this gift in particular that was being used as the wedge to divide the church. This leads me to think that perhaps the listing and description of gifts here is not supposed to be exhaustive, and it isn't even Paul's best list. Rather, Paul's real goal is to say that in our diversity is our unity, in our individual giftedness is our communal strength.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – You Are the Body

January 23, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 12:12-31a](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing the focus on gifts of the Spirit this week. But while last week was to emphasize the unity of the whole community of faith, this week shifts to the individuals who are gifted among the body. But even there we note that individual gifts serve the whole, even in ways that aren't always seen so readily. In the preaching notes, there is a call to identify workers within the church who may have some of the "humbler" tasks and thank them during worship. Whether that be cleaners or nursery workers, or Sunday school teachers or office volunteers, find a way of recognizing their labors on behalf of the whole body. You wouldn't be the church you are without them.

Perhaps even more difficult, or more unseen, would be to recognize those unofficial gifts that help the church be hospitable and energized. Who are the unofficial greeters or hosts, those who make even first timers feel like they belong? Who is always there to lend a hand when something needs done at church? Who drives the youth to the ball games or is first to sign up for vacation Bible school when the list goes out? Who always helps meet budget when things are tight or when something goes wrong with the HVAC system? Who wields a mean paintbrush or brings cookies for coffee hour? Who are the last ones out the door because they make sure that chairs are put back and lights turned off? There are many who share their gifts in ways that even they might not have recognized unless you point it out. There are many tasks that need doing and those who step up are sharing their gifts in a way that builds up the body. Spending time in recognition is time well spent.

But more than recognition, there could be the opportunity for some to give testimony to the joy of service and how relationships are grown through shared labor in service to others inside and outside the church. Maybe bring back the last group who went on a mission trip months ago or even longer, and ask what remains, what motivates them today from that service long ago.

Like Jesus told us, during worship we can pray for workers because the harvest is plentiful. This is not to guilt people into service, but a reminder that these individuals are not to carry the weight for everyone, but to be an example of service that invites others to share their gifts as well. There is no gift that cannot be used to build up the body.

PREACHING NOTES

Go back to last week's preaching notes and say, "ditto!" It would be an interesting approach, don't you think, to preach the same sermon two weeks in a row? Then you will see who is really listening. Certainly, the theme of unity in diversity carries through here as well; you could do a part two.

Most preachers, understandably, would not find repeating a message satisfactory. So, how might we approach this text to distinguish it from the previous part of chapter 12? The previous text speaks of all the gifts going together to make up the whole. This text says each gift goes together to make up the whole. A subtle distinction, to be sure, but nonetheless important. Or you could think of it as last week, we were saying the whole matters, unity matters, the body matters. This week, we could say you matter to the whole, your gift matters to the unity of the body. "You matter" is an important and popular message these days. But Paul's emphasis would be "you matter because the body won't be the body without you, without the gift that you bring, without the person that you are."

The first part of the text could be seen to be dealing with the inferiority complex that many of us have. We might think that our contribution to the whole isn't worth a whole lot, or that we don't measure up to the leaders of the congregation, or the ones up front week after week. "I'm just me," some might think, "nothing special, nothing crucial."

Here is where the preacher can get creative in the local context. Whom can you lift up, or rather what task or ministry doesn't get much press, doesn't seem as dramatic as others? What staff people are often neglected in the thank-you moments in the life of the church? Which volunteers are plugging away unremarked sometimes for years without proper recognition? Many of these workers aren't asking for acknowledgement and might be embarrassed to receive it. So, take care in giving them attention, but helping people find their worth is a valuable and necessary effort.

The second approach that Paul takes in this text is to deal with those with a superiority complex. Here we aren't coaxing some out of the shadows on to the stage for recognition; rather, we are attempting to put some into their proper place as a part of the whole. True, this is a delicate enterprise, and it isn't advised that you engage in it with full prophetic fervor, kicking existential ground of beings and taking nomenclature.

But a little humility would be a good thing in most settings. There are a variety of ways to approach this topic. You could return to the beginning of the text and talk about the source of the gifting. Once we identify our gifts, it can become difficult to remember how we got here. We tend to believe that it is our worth, or our effort, or our goodness that has caused such things to be in our working. But Paul clearly states that any gift worth the title of spiritual gift has come not from within but from the Spirit. We are all sourced from the same reservoir; we drink of the same Spirit, Paul tells us. Because of our common origin, because of our gifts' common origin, we can share in mutual support and mutual honor for whatever it is that we do within the body of Christ.

Another approach within this text is to focus on the interrelatedness of the gifts we use for building up the body. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (vs. 26) We are a part of a whole, not one above another, or one more necessary than the other. We are one.

Yes, there is still individuality. "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (vs. 27.) Individually members, meaning you are important, you the individual, you the person, you matter. But we know that best when we engage in the whole, when we act as a part of the community and not just lone

rangers. “You are the body,” and the best way to hear that phrase is in the true Southern plural: “All y’all are the body.”

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – The Greatest of These

January 30, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

I wonder if there are any songs about love that we could sing this week? And if there were a few, could we find them? Sorry, just kidding. Of course, there are. Probably more than almost anything else we could think of. Even in the world of secular music, love dominates as the preferred subject for singing. So, let’s sing about love this week – about a love that never ends, which for most is only a dream; but within the faith, it is a promise.

Does it feel cliché to focus on love in worship? Does it seem that we might need something more profound? Actually, there isn’t anything more profound than love as the determining force that motivates all that we do as the church. It begins, of course, with the desire to love God more. We’re called to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That seems pretty all encompassing. Can we honestly say that we love God with that kind of passion and fervor? Can we say that all our thoughts each and every day are, “How can I show love to God today? In this decision? In this action? With these words?” Let’s pray for the Spirit to open us up to this loving power and desire.

And then to love our neighbor as ourselves. Some point out that loving ourselves is key to this formula. That may be true; we are called to see ourselves as worth something in God’s community we call the church. We do matter, as we’ve reflected before. And now the call is to love our neighbor as though they were us, our own flesh and blood, our own bodies. Do we love like that? Do we examine our own behaviors not just for what is good for us, but for what is good for the community around us, or for the world? Environmental concerns are a way of loving our neighbor; measuring our impact on the planet, the only home we all have, is an expression of love.

Then we have the amazing and extensive description of love in our text for today. Even at our best, do we measure up to this picture of love? Even with those closest to us, let alone the neighboring world around us, we can all ask to be more loving, as the song says, not just in our hearts, but in our hands and our words, and our intentions. This is a high calling, not a soft response to the neediness of the world in which we live, let alone the demands of a holy life. We pray for help, for Spirit-empowered wisdom to love like this.

So, as we worship, let us sing about loving; let us pray to be more loving; let us hear stories of powerful and transforming love, all with the intention of shaping our everyday lives along the pattern Paul describes in I Corinthians 13.

PREACHING NOTES

Chapter 12 ends with the call to strive for the greater gifts and a hint of a more excellent way. This chapter is that more excellent way. But more excellent way of what? Or for what? For being the church, the body of Christ. Remember, we were talking about giftedness and unity. Or rather we were talking about disunity. There is division in the body. Whether we want to talk about the body of Christ, the church, or whether we want to talk about the body politic, the human community. There is division in the body. Paul sets out to address that division. But not by calling names or pointing fingers. Paul doesn't add fuel to the fire by talking about who is in the wrong and who is in the right. Maybe that needs to happen somewhere, somehow. Maybe that courageous conversation needs to take place somewhere, somehow. But I Corinthians 13 is an invitation to step back from that moment. It is about reframing, about breathing, about claiming the gift that Christ came to give; it's about salvation.

Too often, we talk about salvation primarily in terms of what we're saved from, from sin, from condemnation, from an eternity of frustration and suffering. Or, when we do talk about what we're saved for, we talk about the someday of heaven, of the coming kin-dom, of all that is to come. And to be sure, there are times when such things need to be discussed. But I Corinthians 13 gives us a different answer to the question, "What are we saved for?" We are saved to love; we are set free to love; we are empowered, equipped, enabled to love. That's what it means to be saved. We are saved for love.

This love, then, is described in some of the most beautiful verses in the whole Bible. As a preacher, you could do worse than to simply read and reread and then read these verses again. Let the people hear them. Let these words wash over the consciousness of the gathered body. Let this image of love and of loving reorient our thinking until we long to live out this image of loving in our everyday lives.

The task before the preacher of I Corinthians 13 is to move beyond the comfortable familiarity of these words. Sure, read them once and everyone will nod along with a smile on their face. They'll be remembering a wedding somewhere where these words were used to somehow capture the essence of this wild and crazy promise being made before the gathered overdressed assembly, this human enterprise that escapes human capabilities on a regular basis. They'll be remembering the Pinterest post in fancy calligraphy, or the needlepoint in Grandma's sitting room. We have seen these words, even if we aren't all that familiar with the Bible. Even if our connection to the faith is tangential at best, these words ring a memory in our minds.

But are they too familiar? Have we heard them so often that they have lost their power to amaze? How do we hear the overfamiliar? Persistence. Echoes. We wear away the wall of certainty until we return to the amazement of the power of these words. "If I speak," says Paul in the humility of love, "without love, I am nothing." How might we make this declaration? If I approach the "enemy" on the other side of the aisle without love, then I am nothing. If I look at the one who is different from me, different race, different orientation, different ethnicity, with anything other than love, then I am just flapping my yap. If I stand in reluctant and silent acceptance, while grinding my teeth at what I am losing in so doing, then I am spinning my wheels and not getting anywhere.

We can't recast these words with anything like the eloquence of Paul's pleading with the Corinthians. But we can stand in his certainty that there is a new way of being alive in the world, a new way of seeing the world and everyone in it. Must we simply accept everything going on in our messed-up world with a smile and nod? Of course not; evil exists. But we aren't always the best at identifying where the real evil resides. Paul argues that it would better to lead with love rather than condemnation. And that transformation happens in a loving relationship much more effectively than from a position of judgment and rejection.

This is the more excellent way Paul presents to us. And it still remains so, if we would only give it a try. What if the church were to be known as the place of love and acceptance rather than of division and finger-pointing? What if we treated our brothers and sisters in the faith as brothers and sisters rather than heretics in need of condemnation when their positions differ from ours? And even if those positions need correction, what if we were to approach them in love rather than angry name-calling or shunning?

And if we were able to do this, even a little, then would it be possible that those not yet in the faith, not yet on the path to discipleship, might believe us when we proclaim a God of love and not hate? Would it be possible that they would believe us because they could see it in our own lives and our dealings with one another and with the world? Would this more excellent way be possible? Be excellent?

Whatever you do, preacher, don't present this as something easy. Or as the no-brainer that it ought to be. This will take some major work in each of us and all of us just to begin. And it will, unfortunately, take time. Because we have a long way to go, if the world that we see before us is anything to go by. The good news here is the seed from which this whole series grew, is found in verse 8 of this amazing, incredible, almost too high to grasp chapter: "Love never ends." Thanks be to God.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – Hold Firmly

February 6, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

This week, the text invites us to go back to where we started. We can reclaim our initial acceptance of the faith, when we first said yes to Jesus, or first said it in public in the presence of the loving and supporting church family. Do you remember when you first heard this amazing, good news, heard it in a way that changed your life? Hold on to that moment, Paul says. Maybe this is the week to reaffirm that statement of faith. This could be done with creeds, or a renewal of membership vows. If there are those coming forward for membership, this might

be an appropriate time to bring them forward and let them join as the whole body renews their commitment with them. Or maybe it is time for an altar call. Do they still do that these days? Yes, some do it regularly. But even those who don't, today might be a day to dust off the practice. Give folks space to come forward and kneel as they renew their desire to be made into disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This need not be a highly emotional moment, but it might be for some. Give that space and provide support for those who may be struggling with their decision or a need to confess. It is a difficult line to walk between privacy and community support. Be present as much as possible and have a non-anxious presence that allows whatever responses need to be expressed or felt.

"I Have Decided" might be a song to refresh that first commitment Paul invites the Corinthians, and us, to remember. The Apostles Creed might spark those memories, or a more modern affirmation might help put words to those memories and beliefs. Maybe there is someone with a compelling faith story who could take the congregation on a journey of accepting the grace of a loving God and the impact it has made on life and the o-going support and struggle as they seek to stay on the path. If there is a confirmation class in process, now might be a good chance to let them report on progress: What are they learning or what is their journey like? It would remind the whole body to be praying for those engaged in that process.

This is not a nostalgia trip, but rather a way of gaining resources for continuing to move forward on the discipleship path. Neither is it a claim that our faith must be the same as it was when we first said yes, or at our confirmation. Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians that they need to be just like they were at first. But rather that they and we hold firmly to the ground of our faith, the good news of Jesus Christ.

PREACHING NOTES

Now Paul is nearly done (though we aren't! A long Epiphany this year), so he turns back to the basics. "Now I would remind you," he says, "of what I started with." What you started with. What this whole thing started with. We need to go back and remember together, or even individually remember where we first said yes. When a relationship is struggling, it is often helpful to go back and remember

where it started, to recapture those first emotions and thoughts and decisions. In the book of Revelation, the complaint against the church of Ephesus is that they had forgotten their first love. Having just waded through the love chapter of I Corinthians, Paul now invites the members of the church, who are at odds with one another, to go back and reclaim what they knew at first.

And where does he start? Remember the good news; remember the proclamation; remember Jesus. We must go back to Jesus, at all times, but particularly in times of strife and division. Go back and remember the story, the simple, straightforward story of the life and death and Resurrection of the living Word made flesh. It is still at work in you. Notice that? Paul says not only which you received, and in which you stand, but also that story, that person through which you are being saved. Being saved.

Here is a word for those who think themselves better than the rest: you are still in process. Here is a word for those who think they aren't as good as they should be: you are still in process. God hasn't given up on you, why should you give up on yourself? Why should you consider that you have it made, or will never get it right?

And then, typical Paul, he tells his own story. When all else fails, according to Paul, tell your own story. There was a time when he first heard. There was a moment when everything changed, and he didn't earn it; he didn't deserve it; he wouldn't have chosen himself to receive it. But there it is. There it was. And now everything he is, he is by grace. Not that grace is a free pass, an easy ticket. He "worked harder than anyone of them." Them? Who is them? Which them? Well, he just itemized the other followers or leaders; Cephas and the twelve, and the other leaders, James and all the apostles. Is this the "them"? Is he comparing himself to the other leaders? Probably. And he does it with his typical humble brag: "I worked harder than any of them— though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (15:10). As much as that might frustrate readers, it is not hard to believe that he is sincere. Paul is establishing his credentials, but he is also leaning into the grace that comes from God as the true source for his authority.

Here is an interesting aside: How do we exercise authority? Paul's example is the opposite of the top-down model that says you need to listen to me because I have power or position or wisdom. He says, "I am the least of the apostles, one

untimely born.” It sounds almost Shakespearean. What he means is that he missed the chance to be one of those who stumbled around after Jesus on the earth. That is why, it seems, that he stumbles around after Jesus through the known world at the time as if trying to find the Christ he missed in the flesh but knows and loves deeply in the spirit.

That is the authority he claims, not in him, but in the Christ who lives in him. It is in the relationship, the image of God that radiates from him in his living and his doing. This is what he is pleading with the Corinthians to hold on to – to be able to move past their gifts and go back to the relationship that brought them into the sphere of the Spirit’s influence that now equips them. Hold firmly to the faith that Jesus is who he says he is. And that out of that fundamental relationship comes our motivation for unity and for life within the body and out in the world. Hold firmly to that fundamental relationship, to that first word, to that initial hope that is Jesus the Christ. Hold firmly.

But holding firmly to the good news we first heard doesn’t mean we don’t or can’t grow in our faith. The good news, the proclamation of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ doesn’t change, but our understanding of it does. Our application of it does. Our experience of it does. We change and grow and push the boundaries of our faith all the time. We ask questions; we challenge old expressions of the faith. This is a part of the process in which we engage as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The world won’t change if we keep doing the same things in the same way using the same words we’ve always used.

Still, we can say, “hold firmly to the Christ you heard of and now know on your own and through your community. Hold firmly even as you question and grow.”

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany – The First Fruits

February 13, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 15:12-20](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

It may seem like a huge jump from spiritual gifts to the foundations of the faith, to the Resurrection of the dead. But actually, it makes sense if you think about it.

Paul is inviting the community at Corinth to restart their relationship with the faith, with God, and with one another. Something has gone off the rails, so it is time to get back to what matters. One item of dispute in the church at Corinth was the belief in the Resurrection of the body. So, Paul wants to confront it head on. And to do it, he goes back to Jesus.

While there appears to be some argument about what happens to us, there isn't an argument about what happened to Jesus. So, Paul starts there. Jesus was raised, and was seen, and spoke and ate and interacted. This is what Resurrection is, says Paul, this embodied eternal life. It isn't, he argues, some ghostly, spiritual Resurrection; it is flesh like we know it. But then, he admits, it isn't exactly like we know it, or experience it now. But it is nonetheless real.

What does this mean for worship today? It's Christmas again! No, really, behind Paul's argument is a firm belief in the incarnation. God determined our flesh worth rescuing, worth redemption, so much so that God put on this flesh and walked among us—not put on as in a costume, but put on as became like us, enfleshed. That is the glory of the Christmas celebration. Okay, you just got all that stuff put away. Should you drag it all back out again here in the middle of February? Well, maybe not. But go back and look at the songs you sang, maybe not the baby in the manger ones, but the love came down ones. There is some profound theology in some of the favorite Christmas carols. Maybe you could spring from one of those this day to talk about the wonder of what Christ did in becoming like us.

It is also a continuation of the “you matter” theme. The Resurrection of the body means that this body matters. It is matter and matter matters. Okay, we're getting a bit confused there. But incarnation is a way of saying that this life is important. We aren't just trying to get through it as quickly as we can so that we can enter heaven somewhere. We are living heaven right now. Let it be a celebration of this life, even as we anticipate eternity.

This may not be the place to challenge competing views of what happens when we die. That isn't really what Paul was doing in our Corinthians text. Instead, he is trying to get us to focus on Christ and see in him hope for the future, even as we see a pattern for living today. Jesus is the model of living and loving and dying and rising. And while we may not really know what happens at that threshold moment

between this life and eternity, we embrace the promise and the hope wholeheartedly.

PREACHING NOTES

Paul isn't one to beat around the bush, well, not for long anyway. Eventually he will get to the crux of the matter, often in a way that makes his hearers squirm. There is a debate in the church at Corinth, apparently, and it has to do with Resurrection of the dead. This is why Paul takes the time to itemize the argument. It follows last week's text, where he asks the church to hold firmly to their faith that was proclaimed from the beginning. And for Paul a part of that original proclamation was the resurrection of Jesus as the first fruits.

The phrase "first fruits" is usually used in terms of a sacrifice. We offer to God the first fruits of the harvest, the first fruits of the flocks. It refers to the best, the prime, the labor of our hands and the sweat of our brows that represents the best of what we can produce. There is an element of this in Paul's usage of the phrase, Christ is indeed the best that this world, this flesh has to offer to the divine, to the holy one. There is no better offering than this one.

But Paul isn't using the phrase as a means of setting Christ apart from us. Rather he presents the sacrifice and the offering of Jesus as an example for us and a promise for us as well. We too are called to live sacrificially. We too are invited to live this "more excellent way," as Paul attempts to describe in chapter 13. More than that (what could possibly be more, you would be right to think), the example is not just for this life, but for eternity. Christ as the first fruits is the example of Resurrection. As he was raised, so we will be raised, is Paul's argument. And he is so insistent on it that without it, our faith is futile; and we are back to square one, unredeemed, unsaved, pagan, alone, and adrift in the world. That's how serious he is about this Resurrection of the dead thing. (We'll look more on that specific topic next week, but you can go read ahead if you think it fits more properly here.)

One of the choices you need to make, preacher, is where you want to place the emphasis for your sermon this week. Paul is clearly dealing with a faction within the community at Corinth that no longer believed in the Resurrection. Or rather

they seem to be saying that we will not be raised like Jesus was raised. Perhaps our eternity is something more spiritual, they might have argued. Perhaps it was more like the Greek understanding that at death the soul leaves the body to dwell somewhere else. We are trying to rid ourselves of this earthly shell so that we can abide in eternity with God as spiritual beings.

The reason why there is some consideration here is that there are probably some folks in your congregation who hold to that view. Some might even say that the majority of Christians today hold a view that Paul would take issue with. But is that something you want to try and deal with in a sermon? Or is this a more intensive Bible study or small-group study to be held elsewhere? Might the focus of the sermon be somewhere else?

Maybe this feels like homiletical sleight of hand to you. If we determine that this is Paul's main point here, ought not we make that clear, making the same point? Perhaps. But remember that all of Paul's epistles (with the possible exception of Romans), whether disputed authorship or not, were written in specific situations to deal with specific problems or understandings. So, to keep Paul's model in mind, the preacher ought to begin with the question, "Is this the main issue facing my congregation today?" Is the understanding of what exactly happens between this life and next one the most besetting concern of the congregation, then by all means have at it. But be aware that as you read ahead and into next week's text, even Paul admits he doesn't really know. So, it is speculation to a degree either way.

On the other hand, if what your congregation struggles with is not the next life but this one, then we can look at this text with a new understanding. What doesn't seem to be in dispute in the community at Corinth is that Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul slides off of that subject to make his real point rather quickly. He doesn't spend much ink arguing that. Instead, he argues what it means for us. And what it means is that life matters. Bodies matter; we matter.

Are you catching a glimmer of a consistent theme through these texts in this I Corinthian series? "Love never ends" is not just a catch phrase or a clever grab from a famous text; it is the bedrock of the faith. It is what makes Christ real in our own hearts and in the consciousness of this world we are invited to engage in and with. Our ongoing message is that people matter because they are loved.

People matter because Christ mattered. And Christ mattered so much that death was overthrown, the last enemy to be defeated, Paul said.

His real argument was not really on what entering into the kin-dom would be like, although it was an immanent reality for Paul and therefore worthy of conversation and debate. But all along, his goal was equipping the church to live as reconciled communities to faith and to bear witness to the Christ who opened the door so that they (that we) might live a new life now.

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – Raised in Glory

February 20, 2022 – [1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50](#)

Color: Green

INTRODUCTION

Ditto? Is this a repeat of last week? Are we beating a dead horse – sorry, couldn't resist the image. Well, in a way, you could see this as an extension of last week's emphasis on the bodily resurrection of Jesus and then of us. You could see it as a continuation of the affirmation of the goodness of this life, of bodies, of humanity and the world in which we live. It certainly isn't a denial of any of that. But there seems to be a further point in this text, as Paul continues his appeal to the church in Corinth. Except now he is asking for transformation.

If we just stop with flesh is good, bodies are good, this life is good, then there isn't much reason to grow. We are what we are, and we just need to learn to be content with that. That is an important step in our discipleship journey. But contentment is not complacency. We can grow; we can reach higher; we can live deeper. We are alive, but it isn't hard to deny that we could be more alive. We could tune into the world and activity of the Spirit in mind-blowing ways right now. And it could begin as simply as learning to ask, and keep asking, "Where have you seen God today?"

Worship can be a way of opening the eyes of the congregation to the presence of God at work in their midst, in their lives. It can also call forth a response to that awareness as we take yet another step in the path of discipleship. Worship could provide directions for those who are wondering what the next step in their transformation needs to be (or could be). What spiritual disciplines will help them

move from the physical to the spiritual, as Paul discusses in our text for this week? This isn't, we say again, a denial of the place of the physical. We are physical beings, and Jesus was most concerned with what we do with our lives and resources. That won't change in this life. But we can also be open to another reality: the spiritual.

How could our prayer lives be better? How can we sing in a way that brings us into communion with the Holy Spirit? What is the value of meditation? Or of praying the scriptures? There are many spiritual disciplines that can help us pay attention to this dimension of our faith. And note, earlier in the series we were talking about spiritual gifts; now we are talking about spiritual disciplines; these are not then same thing. There may be some overlap. If someone, for example, has the spiritual gift of prayer, then his/her discipline of praying would work different than in the life of a person who didn't have that gift.

Last week, we suggested taking a look at Christmas songs to see references to the Incarnation as a way of capturing something of what Paul was saying to the Corinthians about the Resurrection of the body. Here again, we can grab a familiar Christmas verse to speak into the meaning of this moment. "Away in a Manger" might seem to be a song for children, and certainly it is beloved by young ones for various reasons. It is the last verse, the fifth in the original, that might be a help for framing worship this week:

Bless all the dear children / In Your tender care / And fit us for heaven / To live with You there.

Did you catch it? That third phrase, "fit us for heaven": that's what we're talking about when we talk about the transformation and the interplay between the physical and the spiritual. Fit us. Admit it; you thought it was "take us to heaven." That's how many people sing it. But originally, it was about that transformation that we, with the help of the Spirit sent by Christ, undergo right now and right here. Our discipleship path and our journey to heaven are the same journey. That is the glory that we are aiming toward; that is the promise that Paul reminds us of when he tells us that we will be raised in glory. Thanks be to God.

PREACHING NOTES

Though it is waning somewhat, it seems to me, there is still an unhealthy fascination with zombies these days. Now there is a sentence I didn't think I would ever write as an introduction to sermon preparation and preaching notes. And yet it fits in an odd sort of way. But first, my complaint – zombies. What's the big deal with zombies? Why are we so intrigued by zombies? Scary movies – like the “...of the Dead” series of which there are far too many; funny movies – like “Shaun of the Dead” a few of years ago; comic books, popular fiction – everywhere you look there are zombies. Aaahhh!

Sorry.

Some argue that horror movies tap into some deep national or global fear and reinterpret it to fit the genre. The monster movies of the '50s were a response to the nuclear threat, fears of science out of control. The robot movies of the '70s were a manifestation of the fears of being replaced by automation. The apocalyptic movies of the last few decades reflect a fear of the devastations of war, or the effects of global warming, or pollution, or who knows what. Movies like *Get Out* or *Us* tap into our racial history and the fears of division within our society, even today. But they also force us to look into our fear that we are part of the problem and not the solution we thought we were; the kind of thing the comic strip *Pogo* was alluding to with the famous “We have met the enemy and he is us” quote.

So, what about zombies? What do they reveal about our hidden fears? Some argue it is AIDs or cancer or any of a number of medical threats that prey upon our minds and hearts these days. How many memes have you seen talking about the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of a zombie apocalypse? Others argue that it represents a soulless leadership that seems to be marching us all to inevitable doom. Maybe. I wonder, on the other hand, if it isn't a physical or a political threat, but a spiritual one instead. I wonder if we have neglected the Apostle's Creed so long that we've lost touch with the meaning of “I believe in the Resurrection of the Body.”

Maybe it is a stretch, but Paul had to contend with those scared of zombies in his day. Sort of. The problem was that there were some who were repulsed by the concept of the Resurrection of the body. “Who would want,” they would argue, “to reanimate dead flesh?” Who would want to re-inhabit this shell that we had

cast off on our death? And that doesn't even include the problems of what kind of death you would be coming back from." What if the body wasn't in fit shape? What if there were pieces missing? Yuck," they argued in Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic (and I confess I don't know the Greek or Hebrew OR Aramaic for "yuck.") So, Paul sighed deeply and wrote the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians to deal with them.

Paul, who is admittedly wrestling with stuff he doesn't really understand, makes a number of different points in this argument. First of all, he argues that Resurrection is God's act, not a natural occurrence. This means that we can't simply look at the world and see what happens. We have to see with the eyes of faith.

There are, however, some symbols in this life that give us a clue, Paul claims. The metaphor of the seed gives us some insight into what is going on in Resurrection. The seed is planted; it "dies" and what grows is something different. The seed doesn't wake up or reanimate. It is transformed by the process of creation. The body is changed, he argues, and what appears is different from what died. In other words, Paul claims, there is a new creation. He wrote of that new creation in a different way in II Corinthians 5:16-20. That was about living as a new creation; this passage is about being made new for eternity. In fact, we have two statements in the Apostle's Creed that we could consider here: "I believe in the Resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." They go hand in hand, of course, but they also share the truth that they straddle that line between the world we know and the world we are heading toward. They both speak to us of life that is bigger than death – or maybe better, life for which death is but a moment, a pause before continuation.

But even continuation isn't quite right. Yes, it continues, but it is also about change, about transformation. Not just a transformation that occurs at death, however. This is a transformation that is at work in us from the moment we accept the gift of life that comes from the one who came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10 – the verse that, for me, encapsulates what Jesus was all about!).

The seeds of that final transformation are at work in us from the moment we claim the salvation that Christ offers. We claim the power of Christ's resurrection

today, even while we wait for our own Resurrection. The transformation is to be made like Christ. We can show glimpses of that life in our flesh, Paul argues, but we are still mortal – still subject to death. Until this final transformation, this new creation that God works in us.

He describes that transformation in a very interesting way. Verse 44 reads like this: “It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body” (I Cor. 15:44). One commentator claims that this is a weak translation of what Paul presents. The weakness comes in the physical versus spiritual split that we often struggle to comprehend. What would a spiritual body look like? A ghost? Not body so much as spirit that is recognizable?

What if we retranslate that first sentence to read: “What is sown embodies the soul; what is raised embodies the spirit.” Now, we usually use *soul* and *spirit* interchangeably. But in Greek “soul” is *psuche* and “spirit” is *pneuma*. “Soul” translates as “creatureliness,” that life force that makes us human, that makes us a part of creation, of earth, mortal. “Spirit” translates as the divine spark, the image of God in which we were created, the treasure that lives in this earthen vessel.

We are, in this life, embodied souls, subject to the needs of the flesh, fragile, earthy, focused on survival and self. Because of that, we are only dim reflections of the Christ who lives in us. We are imperfect examples of a life of the spirit. But resurrected, we will be embodied spirits, living not for ourselves, not subject to the needs of the flesh, but able to mirror the God who gives us life.

Paul seeks to make the point that Resurrection is real, not some ethereal, ghostly undead kind of life. As rich, as real, as wonderful as this life is, Resurrection is even more so. Even though words fail to grasp the realities beyond our experience, faith tells us that God has treasures in store for us.

But the real joy is that we don’t have to wait. We have this gift now, and because of it, though we may think we are dying, or already dead to life and living, because of self and doubt, we do not let go of the life within us. We have caught a glimpse of God, and that is enough to sustain us - body and soul and spirit. Until Resurrection.

Transfiguration Sunday – Seeing the Glory

February 27, 2022 – [Luke 9:28-36 \(37-43\)](#)

Color: White or Gold

INTRODUCTION

We step away from the Epistle text this week as we return to the gospel story of Jesus' Transfiguration. Last week, we talked about our ongoing transformation. But here, it isn't about us, but it is about Jesus. Some might ask what is our role on Transfiguration Sunday? Watch and praise. That's it. We certainly shouldn't be setting up tents and wanting to stay. Peter found that out rather quickly.

If your church is itching for a praise service, this is it. All the hymns and songs about the greatness of our Lord can be sung on this day. All the music that speaks of the awesomeness of God, of the wonder of Christ, of the mystery of the Spirit. This is a moment that defies explanation. And that's a good thing. Spending too much time trying to explain it pulls the mystery out of it, reduces it to a special effects event, instead of the jaw-dropping, heart-pounding moment that it could be.

We pray to the glorified Christ. We bow before the transcendent God. We invite the elusive Spirit to fill us with power and with love, so that we can represent this glorious God in our living each day. Today is a day for creeds, especially if we aren't used to using them. Bringing out one the many statements of faith is a way of worshiping and declaring faith in this amazing God who defines glory before our eyes. Whether it be an ancient creed or a newer affirmation, be sure and emphasize the descriptions of the Trinitarian God we worship on a regular basis.

But Transfiguration is not about our work, but the work that was done before us. Some ask who this event was for, this mountain-top experience. One view is that it was for Jesus, to get him ready for his departure, as Luke puts it in verse 31 of our text. At the same time, however, the voice that comes from the cloud is obviously for the disciples, who were trembling in fear on the ground. At Jesus'

baptism the voice said, “You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased.” Here the voice says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him” (9:35). The voice was telling them, and us, to listen to Jesus. He will get you through the difficult days ahead. We are here on the brink of the season of Lent, a strenuous journey for any who take it seriously. In this mountain-top moment, the offer of the companion is being made, and then he is revealed as capable, as worthy, as glorified, and able. Let us sing a song of praise and of joy.

PREACHING NOTES

In designing this series, we originally chose the epistle reading for this week in keeping with the pattern of working our way through the Corinthian Epistles. Upon reflection, however, it adds a bit of symmetry to return to the Gospel for this Transfiguration Sunday to end our series. We began with Luke for a combined Epiphany and Baptism of the Lord Sunday, then turned to I Corinthians for the Ordinary Time series we called “Love Never Ends,” and now propose returning to the Luke text again. Certainly, the Epistle text, II Corinthians 3:12-4:2 could be used to provide supportive interpretation to the event, and it does speak of seeing the glory that is the risen Christ. Paul’s interpretation of the veiled Moses, however, is problematic for our more modern age. (See Robert Warden Prim, “Homiletical Perspectives on II Corinthians 3:12-4:2,” *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, Vol. 1, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, General Editors, WJK Press, 2009, 447-451.)

So let us return to the Gospel of Luke and that author’s telling of the event we call the Transfiguration. Our series theme, as you recall, is “Love Never Ends.” Over the past few weeks, we’ve been listening in on Paul’s conversation with the church in Corinth as he attempts to unravel some of the knotty problems that community tied themselves into. And through it all, a consistent theme was that people matter, each one matters, and individuals are a part of the whole. And in the last couple of weeks, we even took a glimpse into eternity and discovered that grace, that essence that matters continues on past our limited horizons.

It would seem, then, that a summation statement might be something about the constancy of love experienced through grace. We might want to double down on the idea that God, the God who loves constantly, the God who offers grace

continually, is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Instead, we are presented with change. At the heart of Transfiguration is change. And we are familiar with change.

Change: It is the way of things. For good or for ill, change is all around us; it is the air we breathe and the water we drink. Turn around, and everything is different. We can say we hate change, but it is part of our reality. Change happens to all of us. We are constantly in the process of shedding the old self and putting on the new. And this is a physical reality as much as a spiritual one. We shed our cells at an amazing rate, and they are replaced with new ones. Every minute about 300 million cells are replaced in your body. You are in a constant state of change. Do I seem different? Wait a minute, and you will be.

Our Gospel lesson is about change this week. But not what you would normally expect. This isn't a call to change for the better; it isn't a turnaround or repent passage. It is about a different kind of change all together.

Luke writes "The appearance of His face changed" (verse 29). His appearance. He didn't look like what they were used to looking at. He looked different. He looked . . . more. Transfigured is the word that we have become used to reading here. That sounds more holy somehow, more theological than to say simply that he changed. But the Greek word here is *metemorfw,qh* (*meta-mor-fō-thei*), from which we get *metamorphosis* – or change.

So, what happened on that mountain six days after a conversation about suffering and death? Something. It's hard to say, except by repeating the words that we read there. The appearance of Jesus' face changed. What they were used to seeing they no longer saw, and something they hadn't seen before suddenly became evident to their frightened eyes. And what did they see? Something well-nigh indescribable. Luckily, there were aids to their seeing all around them to help them define what it was that had happened in front of them.

First of all, there were those other guys. Luke says it was Moses and Elijah. I always wondered how they knew who it was. Did they come with name tags? Were there prompters running around with signs? Or was it one of those "they just knew" kind of things? Maybe Moses had his famous staff - the staff by which he parted the sea and then struck the rock to get water. Maybe Elijah had his wilderness clothes on, a John the Baptist motif that showed he was a man of the

desert, a man uneasy with so-called human civilization. Maybe it was a wild look in his eyes. Maybe Jesus called them by name when they appeared. We don't know, because not a lot of attention is paid to the two of them. They were there as props; they were scenery for the lead actor; they were in supporting roles on this day. It wasn't about them. They represented the law and the prophets, the story of the people of God, the heights of the Chosen People. But they were there to draw attention to the one who was the Word of God, who was the Presence of God, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Luke is the only one who spoke of the conversation among the glowing figures on the mountaintop. They appeared in glory too, did you notice that? It wasn't just Jesus; they glowed too. But it was the conversation that drew Luke's attention. They were there to talk about Jesus' departure – checking his ticket, reminding him of the security details, perhaps, no liquids, take all the metals out of his pockets, take off his shoes (Moses said that, I would think). Moses knew about taking off shoes. No, maybe it was something else. Something more. Departure in Greek here is ἔξοδος or “exodus”. Moses knew about exoduses. Exodi? He knew what it was to change everything he knew and everything he was, even for an uncertain future. He knew how to embrace that change even through fear.

That seems to be what this odd little moment on top of the mountain was all about – embracing the change, trusting in the one who brings us through, more than that, who calls us to change, to become more. To become like Jesus. At least that was what it seemed like the voice was saying. The voice that spoke because Peter got the lines wrong. Peter wanted to stand against change. “Let's set up camp here,” Peter said. “Let's just sit; let's just be; let's dig in our heels and hold on to this moment because who knows what the next one will bring. Let us make a declaration that our understanding should never change. We've come this far, aren't we there yet?” “No,” the voice says, “You've got a way to go yet. You are still becoming.” “Becoming what,” we ask? Becoming him. This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him. Pay attention to the change. To the metamorphosis.

In what context do we usually use the word *metamorphosis*? I remember science class, and we were talking about butterflies – the process of changing from a rather ugly wormlike caterpillar into the fragile but breathtakingly beautiful butterfly is metamorphosis, or change. Or maybe it was in earth science, and we

are talking about metamorphic rock. Melted by the heat of the earth's core, the rock flows from one form into another. But here's the question: "Which is the true form of the rock or the creature? Or is the before and the after both a part of the whole? Is it a matter of perspective and a matter of timing?" Where you are and when you are allows you to see one truth as opposed to another.

What happened on that mountain was not so much a change into something different, but a revealing of the essence of the one who was changed. Jesus became who he was on that mountain, even though he was who he was as he climbed up and then down again. He is always who he is. He is always present in the fullness of his being. We can see only a part of him, the part we need at any given moment. We experience only a piece, a dimension of the reality that is the Christ. And we get used to that; it becomes familiar to us.

But every now and then, we catch a glimpse of something larger, something deeper and more profound. Every now and then, we hear a word that reverberates in our soul for weeks, if not a lifetime. Every now and then, a tear comes to our eye as we stand on the precipice of glory. Every now and then, a lump comes to our throat as we encounter the depths of love and sacrifice. Every now and then, we climb a mountain and see what it is that we are following in what is most often the darkness of this life. Every now and then, we move a little closer, grow a little taller, and listen a little better. Every now and then, we catch a glimpse of the appearance of his face. And all we see is love – love so deep he would die for the object of that love; love so powerful everything is changed by that love; love that goes on and on, even through our own inconstancy, our wavering acceptance and application of that love. In him, we see a love that never ends.