

The background is a rich, multi-colored composition. At the top, a rainbow arches across the frame. Below it, several hearts of various colors (red, purple, green, blue) are scattered. The lower half is filled with intricate, swirling patterns in shades of red, orange, yellow, and blue. The entire scene is punctuated by numerous small white stars and flowers, creating a magical and celebratory atmosphere.

TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

February 14, 2021
Transfiguration Sunday

Prelude

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop, and God called him “beloved.” We worship together as God’s children, and we, too, are called “beloved,” transformed when we live in the love of Christ. Today, let us worship with open hearts and minds to receive God’s grace.

Hymn: “Fairest Lord Jesus,” vv. 1,3,4 (UMH #181)

Reading the Word: Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Ministry of Music

Message: “Transformed by Love”

Today we remember the story of Jesus’ Transfiguration when he took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain where he was transfigured in front of them. Elijah and Moses appeared, and the disciples were overwhelmed at the sight before them and most likely bowed low to the ground. All at once, a voice from heaven spoke, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” When the disciples dared to lift their eyes again, only Jesus was there.

Well, I don’t know about you, but that would have left an impression on me! Jesus warned them not to say anything about what they saw and experienced. Really? Wow! That would have been a challenge! Yet, somehow, throughout Jesus’ ministry, and even in this experience, the disciples seemed to be rather dense when figuring out Jesus’ identity. In fact, as the gospel of Mark continues, their difficulty in recognizing him becomes worse.

The writer of Mark appears to be saying that, in order to truly understand who Jesus was, the disciples needed to have the whole picture. Sharing this amazing experience would have to wait until they saw Jesus arrested, convicted, and put to death, and raised from the dead. Only then, could they fully comprehend who this man was - the Son of God who brought the very presence of God to them, and only then, could their transformation begin. When we hear the words spoken that day, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him," we are hearing almost the words spoken at his baptism. In this passage, God adds, "Listen to him!" This is a link that ties the beginning of Jesus' ministry to his commissioning his followers to carry on his mission and ministry in the world.

The words, "This is my Son, the Beloved . . ." touches my heart and encourages me, because throughout the Bible we find assurances that, in Christ, we too are beloved children of God. I am reminded of the baptism of a friend and colleague of mine. She had never been much of a church goer until she met and married her husband. They began attending worship together, and, after a while, she wanted to be baptized.

When the day of her baptism arrived, she and her husband stood together in front of the pastor. On the wall behind the altar was a large stained glass window, and as the baptism ritual came to an end, the sun hit the window in a blaze of light, and the rays poured over my friend's head. It was a speechless moment for everyone, and my friend felt not only her pastor's and husband's hands on her, but also the hand of God.

Most of us don't have an experience like that, but, throughout the scriptures and hearing the stories of other saints in our lives, we have assurances that God cares for us, and God loves us. Interestingly, today is St. Valentine's Day, a day about love and caring. Most of us think of it as a time for romantic love and showing the beloved person in our lives how deep our love is for them. But I was interested in learning a little more about this day that is specifically devoted to love.

It originally began, like so many Christian holy days have: as a pagan holiday called, "Lupercalia" which was held on the Fifteenth of February. It was a fertility festival dedicated to Roman gods. In the fifth century, Pope Gelasius declared a Christian observance of February Fourteenth as Valentine's Day. Some people say that it was named after a priest named Valentine, and there were actually three priests named Valentine with varying histories. But all of them showed the same characteristics: compassion, kindness, and romance.

So how does this tie in with the Transfiguration of Jesus? When we think of Valentine's Day as one where priests reached out to care for people and to share the love of God with others through their words and actions, we see an example of God's love being shared in the way that Jesus taught his disciples. Jesus was named and claimed by God as the "Beloved," and, in our baptism, we are also named and claimed as "Beloved." Remembering that we are loved and cherished by God gives us a commission to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus. We are called to step out of our comfort zones, to be compassionate, to share the *agape* love that helps others to know God through us.

When we claim our identity as God's Beloved, we accept and follow our Beloved Jesus, the Christ, and he walks with us as we journey through life. We are the Body of Christ, called to carry on his ministry of forgiveness, compassion, kindness, and love. When we doubt, when we are afraid, when we worry, when we are unsure, we can remember that God has named and claimed us. God calls us beloved and asks us to care for other beloved children.

I would like to share a prayer that Rev. Rachel Fraumann, at the Hedding UMC in Barre, VT wrote this week:

Beloved God, Here I am – your Child.

Am I Beloved? The days are long the months are short

What am I to say? To pray? I am terrified.

Well, sometimes. Sometimes I'm just bored. Often I'm overwhelmed.

Am I Beloved? Even when I can't handle it anymore? Even when I wish I could escape it all?

Emotions rage, to-do lists totter. They tell us to be still. I am restless.

I believe! Help my unbelief! Transform me!

So that I can rest in you. And know that you are God. My refuge and strength.

I hear your voice: "Beloved little one, you are enough. Peace. Be still.

Know that I am God. Know that there is nothing you can do

Or not do To separate yourself from being My Beloved Child."

Let us trust God's guidance and presence with us. Let us live as those who have been transformed, named and claimed by the One who loves us beyond all comprehension, and truly, that is the greatest love of all. Amen.

Prayer:

Holy God, your message to the world on that mountaintop was that Jesus was your beloved Son. Help us to remember that you also claim us as your beloved children who are called to share your love and offer hope to all your children, our brothers and sisters as members of the family of God. We live in a broken world, but the message of the ways your love can transform our lives is powerful and needs to be shared. May we continue to reach out to others sharing the Light of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Shine, Jesus, Shine," vv. 1,3 (FWS #2173)

Blessing



PRAYER LIST

Jen Patria, Naomi, Bill Stover, Erin Frane, Carol, Jim Reynolds, Crisp Family, Jim Slater, Jeanne Westcott, Gayle Gardei & Family, Dixon Family, Charles Gilman, Barbara Clement, Harry Junkins, Felipe & Family, Fred, Sophia, Barbara Glidden, Mark & Sarah, Jen, Danny Westbrook, Millie, Suzanne & Babe, Juliann, Dan Strange, Bobbie Noble, Durgin Pines Residents & Workers, Riverside Rest Home Residents & Workers, Kittery Estates Residents and Workers
Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19
Those in nursing and assisted living care,
Our Denomination – Our Church Family



FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



DIGITAL GIVING OPPORTUNITY

Simply point your phone camera on the QR code to make an online donation through PayPal to any of the following:

- My Pledge
- Kids First Fund
- General Fund
- Building Fund