

Transformed to Boldness

Oh Lord, we seek your wisdom now that we may understand your Word for us today.

Transform us by your love, mold us in your mercy, and guide us in your grace.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, shine a light that will illumine our darkness, that as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed that we may celebrate anew what you say to us this day.

And let God's people say... **Amen.**

Our first scripture reading comes from 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Our second scripture reading comes from the Gospel of Luke 9:28-36 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The Gospel account of the Transfiguration has always been a difficult text for me. Not because the plain story is hard to understand, but that I have always asked the questions of why. Jesus is transformed before the eyes of the apostles. Moses and Elijah crash the party. Peter has no idea how to respond. He's revealed in glory! Then it is gone. Then nobody says anything. There are, like many passages in the Bible, different explanations. But as I was thinking about that transformation, I reflected upon the image. Christ transformed into glory. On one side, Moses, the man of the law. On the other side, Elijah, a prophet among prophets. Both the law and the prophets are there, illuminated by a transformed Jesus. Christ shines a light on them both that lets us see them differently than we could without him. The law and the prophets, scripture as we know it, is transformed when we see it in the light of Christ. We are called to be transformed in the same way.

This is not the sermon I intended to give. The scriptures are the same. The title is the same. I would say that the overall meaning is the same. But after some deep

reflection and some very difficult time in prayer, I decided that I couldn't give the sermon I originally intended to give. The original point of that sermon was to highlight that we must be transformed by God into those who are bold in our declarations. That we boldly proclaim the Good News to all who will hear! That we act with boldness to do what is right and good. That we are transformed to be a people bold enough to speak out when something needs to be said. That we do not hide our faith but share it lovingly and without fear. And as I reflected on that idea, I realized that I could not do that without living it myself. My original message was about boldness, but not so much about being bold myself. The 2019 Special Session of General Conference is over. The arguments are not. The hurt is not. The disagreements are not. I'm not sure they ever will be gone. I don't think disagreement will go away as long as we are human and left to human understanding. But I felt called to speak up for those who feel they have no voice. I was called to be bold myself in sharing where the Spirit is calling. And it is calling me to talk to you today.

The Special Session of General Conference voted, in my opinion, not to move forward but to double down on not letting the tent get any bigger. You may have seen it in the news. You might have read about it. You may have an opinion that is different than mine. I respect that. My boldness today is to ask that I can get that same respect for my witness in Christ. Some have said that this was a battle between those who follow the Bible and those who don't. Alternatively, I see this as a disagreement over *how* we read the Bible. In all honesty, we probably disagree about many ways in which we interpret scripture. The United Methodist Church houses many people of differing opinions. In our Tuesday Bible Study, we went through the Book of Revelation. Instead of teaching simply my view, I decided to teach about the multiple ways it was interpreted as well. In that, we discovered different major divisions on how people read Revelation. But within those there were countless subdivisions. What I learned from that study was that we can read the same thing, come to different conclusions, but still be one together in mission for Christ. My boldness today is not to ask you for *uniformity* but to ask you for *unity*. Though we may think differently on some issues, does that mean that we

cannot be brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus? No! We are called to be the body of Christ redeemed by the blood! I don't want to separate from my brothers and sisters that believe differently than I do. I want to understand them and work with them. But in that same thought, I want them to be able to do the same. To understand that my convictions come from my understanding of Scripture. That I am not turning my back on God, but to me, I am opening my heart to his people. I simply want there to be room at the table for people that earnestly seek Christ and want to share the Gospel message. That includes my brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ community. Because all I can see are Disciples of Jesus Christ.

The more I thought about it, the more I couldn't hold my tongue. I may have had the privilege to be silent, but I didn't have the moral conviction to not speak out. I don't want to see a brother or sister leave. But I know there's hurt going on. I understand if the hurt grows to the point you can't continue. My promise is that I will be here for you. If you need a new spiritual home, I will be here. I will help you, no matter your situation, no matter who you are, I will help you to either feel at home here or to find somewhere you can. Because I cannot forget my baptismal promises to God. I don't want to see anyone walk away from the United Methodist Church out of hurt. But I would hate to see someone walk away from Christ because of hurt. It's also because of this that I have chosen to show my unity with all people in what I wear when I preach. It isn't about telling someone else they are wrong, it is about being true to my calling in Christ Jesus. It is about boldly declaring that my Savior is one of love and mercy. That I am called to be transformed into greatness, not weakness. I'm called to be transformed into mercy, not judgement. And I'm called to be transformed to boldness, not silence. I will speak up for the marginalized because I feel it is simply the right thing to do to serve Christ. Because he spoke up and spent time with the marginalized. He went out of his way to see them as people and went out of his way to teach us to love instead of hate. I will always do the best I can to live by the Discipline of the church, but I will not abandon humanity to do so.

I have been told that I don't read the Bible the right way if I can't agree with those who feel that the LGBTQ community should be excluded from marriage and the ministry. They will point to a handful of specific scriptures and say that, for them, the meaning is clear. I can respect that. However, that isn't how I read those same scriptures. When I read the Bible, I try to do so with the veil lifted and read by the light that Christ shines on every verse in the Bible. I try to read it with Christ transforming what was old into something new. I read it knowing that I may disagree with things, and I then pray and study to understand it better. Through that, I have come to believe that a loving relationship between same sex partners isn't something I can condemn. There's a myriad of reasons, and I am happy to sit down with anyone to discuss them in detail. I'm willing to sit down and hear you out if you disagree with me. I rejoice in being able to discuss our differences that we may understand each other better! What I cannot celebrate is if you give me an ultimatum that I understand scripture by your interpretation and your interpretation alone, *or else*.

To me, the Word of God will always be alive and vibrant. To me, the veil is constantly being lifted, giving us a greater depth of understanding to things we might not have understood before. The Bible will speak to us about issues that didn't even exist when it was written! How? Because we interpret it! We understand that God never stopped speaking to us! I don't believe that the Bible is simply an instruction booklet that is to be read literally and cannot be interpreted differently or disagreed with. I disagree with Paul about multiple subjects. That doesn't mean I reject the Bible and God. It doesn't mean I reject Paul's writings. It means that God has placed a different Word in my heart. I don't think women need to have their heads covered, and I believe that women can be better teachers than men. If I disagree with Paul, does that mean I don't want Paul to be heard? No! It means that Paul saw things differently than I do. If you agree with Paul, does it mean that you are wrong and should be ashamed of being wrong? Not at all! What can we do? We can understand each other and make room for each other.

If the Spirit leads me to believe an Old Testament rule was not meant to be a forever rule, does that mean I don't believe in the teachings of the Bible? Of course not. Clarifications are made and new situations discovered right from the onset of the law. We then look at the law in boldness, with the veil lifted, and see it in the glory of Christ. And what happens if we have a situation that isn't spoken about clearly? The Old Testament is thousands of years displaced from us today. We have certainly experienced things that were not spoken of by biblical authors. So, we interpret scripture to guide us. And sometimes we come up with opposite conclusions. The question for me isn't if one has *read* the Bible but if one is *living* the biblical call. The Bible is a diverse book with differing authors recounting different experiences. The only thing I ask is that I be allowed to bear witness to God in the way that Scripture has been revealed to me. I pray that I can give you that same room. I pray this will lead us to be able to come to the same table and be of one body, redeemed by one blood.

Could I be wrong? Certainly. I could be wrong about everything. I'm not God, so I truly do not know. But my convictions call me to err on the side of grace. If I am to be wrong, I will be wrong because I loved too much. If I am to be wrong, I chose to be wrong because I forgave too much. Because I thought mercy went much farther than it did. If I am to be wrong for reaching out to the marginalized and the outcasts, I'll have to account for that. In that, I fully put my trust in my God to help me. But the Spirit has led me to this place. In this place, I ask for compassion for those who are hurting, love for all, and mercy befitting the Christ that died for our sins. I will try to walk in the same boldness that caused Abraham to plead for the innocent. I will try to walk in the boldness that caused Moses to plead for the lives of the Israelites. I will try to walk in the boldness of the prophets, who would not be silenced from speaking God's Word. I will try to walk in the boldness of Christ, who continues to transform the world with his bold assertion that we could love one another. I pray that we may move forward, together, united in Christ and united in love. Amen.