

**“Let Me Put on My Lipstick”**  
Transfiguration Sunday, Year C  
A Sermon for Every Sunday  
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*Luke 9:28-36*

Their mother had died. As we sat together, they told me stories about her life, and her faith, and the strength that she had shown in her illness.

One story stood out in my mind. They told me about her first surgery. The operation took place late in the day, and her family could not see her until early the next morning. So when her daughters arrived at the hospital bright and early the next day, they expected to see their mom with tubes, and bandages, and a look of exhaustion on her face.

Instead, when they walked in the room, they found that their mother had gotten up very early, and asked the nurses to give her a bath and wash her hair. Then despite her fatigue and the constant pain, she applied her makeup and did her hair. Her daughters were amazed. Mom looked wonderful.

The nurse pulled them aside later and said, “Your mom wanted to look radiant for you, because she does not want you to worry.”

I’ll bet you have known people like this – people who are suffering, struggling, perhaps facing death. WE think we’re taking care of THEM, but they are really taking care of us! And, no matter how they are feeling physically, their love is radiating, they carry themselves with grace and beauty.

My own mother certainly did that as she lived with cancer. I remember the last Thanksgiving that we shared. She was in the midst of horrible chemo. She was so physically weak.

But there she was on Thanksgiving day, sitting in *her* seat at the end of the table.

She wanted everything to be perfect *for us*, because that's what mom's do. Despite her pain, she was dressed beautifully, she smiled. She could not eat, but she had cooked all of our favorites. We knew that we were losing her, but she was so full of love. There were several times during that last Thanksgiving when I just looked at my dying mother and I said to myself: "*She's radiant!*"

In Luke's Gospel, *Jesus is radiant*.

But his radiance finds its deepest meaning only if we keep one fact in mind. In Luke's Gospel, this scene takes place between two crucial moments. Just before Jesus and the 3 disciples go up the hill, Jesus speaks some hard but honest words: "If you want to be my disciple, you must deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me. Whoever loses their life for my sake will save it."

Jesus loves us enough to tell us the truth. IF we are going to follow him, it will cost us something. Because the kingdom costs HIM everything. WE must follow him – right to the cross. This is the invitation to self-giving, self-emptying love. The call to give our lives.

THAT is the message of Jesus just before he takes Peter, James and John up the mountain. And then just a few verses AFTER the Transfiguration occurs, we hear that Jesus resolutely determines that his is going to Jerusalem. And what will happen there? He will die, on the cross.

So, the glory of the Transfiguration takes place in the midst of Jesus' willingness to make his way to Jerusalem, the place of his passion. And it takes place in the midst of Jesus' invitation for us to follow him, passionately, to the place of our self-giving.

This scene of the Transfiguration takes place *as Jesus undertakes his journey to Jerusalem... to die*. Death is already hunting him down. The religious leaders had already concluded, "This Jesus must die."

And Jesus knows it. He's already predicting his crucifixion. Death is on the horizon.

And it is precisely then, as Passion and death are in the air, that Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain. He becomes *radiant* before their eyes. Everything about him, from his clothing to his face, is transfigured by something glorious.

The timing of all this might seem strange. Why would the transfiguration of Jesus take place just then, in the middle of all of this talk of his passion? As I pray about that question, I have an intuition. Perhaps Jesus is *taking care of his disciples*. Remember, these are the same three disciples – Peter, James, and John – who will see him sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. They will see him arrested. They will see him die.

They will see the worst happen to him, but in this moment of transfiguration, he is giving them a glimpse of the best – a glimpse of what the resurrection will look like. He is giving them a glimpse of what eternal life looks like, what glory looks like. He is showing them that not even his impending death can rob him of his dignity and nobility. He is showing all of us what our future holds, if we *listen to him* and *follow him*.

Like anyone who is facing suffering, or struggles, or death, Jesus had choices to make. He could have chosen to become self-centered, focused on his approaching pain, his own sacrifice.

But instead, he chose to do what so many noble souls have done even as death hunts them down. He radiated love. He radiated beauty. In that moment, everything about him was pointing to a future full of hope.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is one way that God promises all of us that there is always hope, that every person can change, that there will always be a way to start anew. On that mountaintop, God gave us a glimpse of how the terrible tragedy of Jesus' death was going to be transformed, transfigured, into something glorious on Easter morning.

And if God the Father can do that for his Son, God can do that for all of his

daughters and sons. God loves us. He sent Jesus to die and rise for us. That risen Jesus is walking beside us. And because of that, God is saying to us that no matter what suffering is ours, no matter what sacrifice we're called to make, no matter what cross we are carrying, the Almighty God has a plan for us, and that same God can transfigure *our* dying into glorious *rising*.

If God can do that for me, God can do that for *everyone*. Which means that there is no one on earth that God is willing to give up on. And if *God* is not giving up on people, how can I give up on them? If *God* is not giving up on any situation, then how can I give up in any situation? And if God refuses to say that some problems can't be solved, then how can I throw up my hands and declare that 'nothing can be done, and nothing should be tried, that there is no hope.'

If we pay attention, we may discover that Transfigurations are happening all around us.

Which brings me back to that lady in the hospital room. Even in her illness, she chose to radiate life. And even at the Thanksgiving table, as my mom was struggling, she chose to radiate love. And so many people who are being hunted down by death choose to radiate joy, and tenderness. As one person said to me after his wife died: "Even when something as ugly as death was on the horizon, she choose to create something beautiful."

*Even when something ugly was on the horizon, she chose to create something beautiful.*

What would happen if you and I, with the help of God's grace, chose to *create something beautiful*, no matter what ugliness is surrounding us? What if we chose to be transfigured by God's love, even when struggles and the cross are all around us?

How would the world be changed if we chose to radiate something beautiful in every situation?

+ if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when everyone else in our family is

filled with anger, or impatience, or judgment

+ if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when our friends and neighbors seem filled with gossip and pettiness.

+ if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when our spouse has withdrawn, hurt us, ignored us

+if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when everyone else around us is passing judgment on the poor, speaking harshly of the immigrant, denying the dignity of human life

+ if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when our colleagues at work have created a harsh and horrible environment

+ if we Chose to radiate Christ's beauty, even when acts of terror and violence and aggression seem to be the preferred method of response

+ if we chose to radiate Christ's beauty, when every fiber of our being is telling you that it is OK to be selfish, OK to be self-centered, OK to complain about what is happening to you.

We don't have to wait until the end of our lives to experience the power of God's love to transfigure us. It can happen today, because the Christ who took his first disciples up the mountain is present in our midst. Just a few weeks ago we heard how Jesus changed water into wine. If Christ's love is able to change *a beverage*, just imagine how his love can change *you!*

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