

Deciding to Be Transformed  
Matthew 17:1–9; Matthew 16:24–26; 2 Corinthians 5:16–21  
Sunday, February 15, 2026 (Transfiguration)

Let us pray: Help us to listen to you, Lord, and hear the Word that you are speaking, that it might reveal your glory to us, and we can reflect that glory into the world, in Christ. Amen.

I am a creature of habit. Whether it's eating the same thing for lunch each day or following the same exercise routine at the gym or even finding a consistent pattern of prayer that helps me feel centered and connected to God, when I find a rhythm or routine that works for me, I like to stick with it. It makes me feel *comfortable* and *safe*. It helps make life feel predictable, when so much of life feels *unpredictable*. I would imagine I'm not alone in that. So many of us are creatures of habit, finding things in life that help us feel comfortable and safe and wanting them to *stay* that way.

And so I can *identify* with Peter in this story of Jesus' transfiguration. He has this amazing experience where he sees Jesus for who he truly is. He sees God's glory radiating out from Jesus, and he *gets it*. Then he sees Moses and Elijah, these two great heroes of his faith who have been dead for centuries, but all of a sudden they are standing there talking with Jesus. This has to be the greatest experience of Peter's life so far, and he wants to *hold on* to it (understandably). So he says to Jesus, "Lord it is good for us to be here! Let's make three tents – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah – and just stay here. Let's just keep it like this forever!"

But no sooner does he say those words than a bright cloud signifying the presence of God overshadows them, and a voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him." And just like that, it's over, and they follow Jesus back down the mountain. Because God is not a creature of habit. God is a *creator of new things*. And God does not call us to stay in the same place, doing the same things, forever. In fact, what God calls Peter and James and John and *us* to in this story is

to *listen to Jesus*. “Listen to him.” Not to *ourselves*. Not to our own desires or preferences; how we *want* things to be. Not to the world around us. Not to what is familiar and safe and comfortable. God says, “This is my Son. Listen to *him* – to where *Jesus* wants you to go and what *Jesus* wants you to do, even though it may not always be familiar or comfortable or safe.” God calls us to follow Jesus out into the world, beyond all the safe, comfortable places in life. God calls us to *new things*; to be *made new*. God calls us to *listen* to Jesus, so that we can become more and more *like Jesus* – loving as he loves, healing as he heals, serving as he serves. God calls us to *transformation*.

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Now, don’t misunderstand me. God loves you just the way you are. God *accepts* you just the way you are. There is nothing you *have* to do to make God love you more, and there is nothing you *can* do to make God love you less. You are good enough for God *just as you are*, even if you *never* change. So it’s not that we have to transform *and then* God will love us. It is *because* we experience the unconditional love and acceptance of God that we *want* to transform. We experience the grace of God, *and because of that*, we want to live new lives that reflect God’s glory and love to everyone around us. We experience this thing that is so great, and we want to live in ways that say *thank you*.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the most important theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he famously talked about this in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He talked about the difference between what he called *cheap grace* and *costly grace*. Cheap grace is when we receive the grace and forgiveness of God, and it makes us *feel good* – we are *consoled* by it – but it doesn’t make any real difference in our lives. It doesn’t effect any change in the way that we live. We just keep doing the things we’ve always done before. It is grace that doesn’t *cost* us anything, so it isn’t *worth* very much. Cheap grace.

*Costly* grace, on the other hand, calls us not just to *believe* in Jesus Christ, but to *follow* him; to *live* for him. It is *costly*, Bonhoeffer says, because it cost Jesus his life. And so, in turn, it costs us *our* lives, the

lives that we *used* to live or *would* live if we were left to our own devices. So it is *costly*, but it is *grace* because it *gives* us the only *true* life. Costly grace requires something from us – not *in order* to receive it, but *because* we have received it. We can't act the same way we did *before* we experienced that grace. We can't treat people the way we did *before* grace. We can't order our lives the way we did before grace. The experience of God's grace changes everything about us. It changes our priorities and how we order our lives. It changes how we speak and act and treat other people. It changes how we use our time and money and abilities.

The way that Bonhoeffer talked about this, the most important word in his entire theology, was *decision*. He said that the grace of God demands a definitive *decision* from every person. "What will I do now with this life that I have been given?" He said that we cannot remain neutral or detached when confronted with Christ's call to "follow me." He said that a decision to believe is invalid unless it translates into *action*, into outward, concrete obedience to God. Costly grace requires a person to make a life-altering decision to follow Jesus Christ, even (or *especially*) at the risk of great personal sacrifice.

It cost Bonhoeffer his life, literally. As a Christian in Nazi Germany, he stood against the Nazis and entered into a failed plot to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested, placed in a concentration camp, and executed. But his last words as he walked to the gallows were, "This is the end, but for me, the beginning of life." Bonhoeffer made a decision in light of the grace that he had experienced. That decision might not look the same for *us*. It might not cost *us* what it cost *him*. But it should cost us *something*. Because what has cost *God* so much cannot be cheap for *us*. We have to make a *decision* to be *transformed*.

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Now, that's a bit of a paradox. How do you *decide* to be *transformed*? We can't transform ourselves. Transformation comes through the work of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. But we can open ourselves up to it. We can start by saying, "God, I am so grateful for the grace you have given me, for the love and

blessing that you have poured out on me. I want to live a new life for you. I want to be transformed. I want to be a more patient, kind, faithful, loving, generous, joyful person who uses my life to help others.” And then recognizing that God does not just instantly make us more patient and kind and faithful and loving and generous and joyful. God gives us *opportunities* to practice patience. God gives us *opportunities* to show kindness. We are given *opportunities* to trust God and to love others. God gives us *opportunities* to practice generosity. God gives us *opportunities* to help others. We just have to *recognize* those opportunities when they come and *take* them, even when they scare us or make us uncomfortable.

We open ourselves up to transformation, and then we take a step. And then another. And another. And before we know it, we’re walking with Jesus. But those steps are going to take us away from the places that are familiar and comfortable and safe.

Jesus tells his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” It’s denying our own will and desires for our lives. Sometimes it’s denying our own instincts and impulses, how we *would* live our lives if we were left to our own devices. And Jesus says, “Let them take up *their* cross.” He doesn’t call us all to take up *his* cross. For Jesus the cross was literal, and it cost him his life. For Bonhoeffer, the cross was a noose that cost him his life. But Jesus calls us to take up *our* cross. What is it for *us*, and what will it cost *us*?

Jesus says that those who want to *save* their life will lose it. Those who hold on so tightly to their lives or to the places that are comfortable and safe, they’ll end up losing out on real life. But, he says, “Those who lose their lives for my sake,” those who *let go* of control over their lives, who do not cling to money or material possessions or safety or comfort, but instead cling to *Christ*, they will end up *finding real life*.

What are you holding onto that is keeping you from really living the life that Jesus has for you? Comfort? Familiarity? Safety? Pride? Material possessions? An addiction? Anger? Hatred or a grudge? Pain? Grief? Fear? Jesus has a life for you that is *so much better* than that. You just have to decide to open yourself up to it and take it when it comes.

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I want us to really be aware of what has happened here today; of what we have been a part of. Because we have been a part of something amazing and beautiful today. We have witnessed someone open herself up to Jesus and take hold of the life that he is offering her. In Katy's baptism, we have been a part of the beginning of a new life. And that new life is there for *all of us*, even if we've already been baptized, like Mark. In renewing the promises of his baptism, Mark has opened himself up to this new life *again*. And we can *all* do that.

Paul says that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away – all of the old sin and pain and fear that we lived with and carried around with us, we have *died* to it and been made *new*. We can let go of it and leave it behind – leave it here today – and we can take hold of this new life that Christ has for us. We can *all* come to God and say, “I want *that!* I want this new life that you have for me; the life that only you can give. I want to open myself up to it and take a step and become the person that you created me to be.” It is *never* too late to start living a new life. You can be 90 years old and start living that new life. And no one is ever too stuck or too far gone or too *bad* to start living that new life. You can have a trail of pain and mistakes behind you, but you can take one more step and leave it all behind.

We can *all* make a decision to be transformed; to start living a new life that *listens* to Jesus and *follows* him. Transformation can be scary, leaving behind what is familiar and comfortable and safe, even if it's not the best thing for us. It's funny how sometimes we can cling to things that aren't good for us just

because they're familiar. But no matter how scary it is, if we listen to Jesus, we will hear him say as he said on that mountaintop 2,000 years ago, "Get up and do not be afraid." Because there is something *so much better* waiting for us, in Christ. Amen.