

# Be Loved Faith Study

## Session 5: Be Transformed, Be a Blessing

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We are invited to be transformed by God's love. We are invited to be hopeful and surprised by the places where God shows up, where God is acting and where God calls us to be. In all this, we are blessed – and more importantly – God's love works through us to be a blessing to others and to the community.

### **Opening Questions** (select 1 or 2 questions)

- When have you experienced real jaw-dropping awe in your life? Where were you? What happened?
- The changing of the seasons is an ever-renewing process of transformation. Share a favorite example of how plants or animals change with the seasons.
- Are you someone who makes New Year's resolutions? What is a humorous or unattainable resolution you'd like to make?

### **Opening Prayer & Responsive Reading**

*Begin with a few minutes of silence. Ask God to care for all that has been on your heart and mind today.*

One: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.

**All:** Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

One: Beloved, since God loved us so much,

**All:** We also ought to love one another.

One: If we love one another, God lives in us.

**All:** And God's love is perfected in us.

One: Amen.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

*The writer of Luke records the glorious transformation that Peter, James, and John witnessed on the mountaintop. Although most of us won't have such a dramatic spiritual experience, God invites us to be transformed by God's love every day of our lives. We are reminded to be hopeful and surprised by the places where God shows up, where God is acting, and where God is calling us to be. When we face the world with a spirit of openness and anticipation that we will be changed, we step outside of our comfort zone and are blessed by all the ways we see God around us. We find ourselves letting God's love work through us to be a blessing to others.*

*Luke 9: 28-36 (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.

**Think About...** *(optional, depending on time)*

- What word or phrase speaks to you today from the Bible readings?
- What do you find comforting and what do you find confusing or mysterious in this story?
- The story ends with the words, "And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen." What do you think your response might have been? What might be some reasons for keeping silent?
- God says, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." In what ways does this phrase encourage you? Challenge you? Convict you? Cause you to reprioritize your life? Motivate you?
- Jesus took only three disciples with him up the mountain. How do you think this experience impacted Peter, John and James?

**What Do Others Say?**

The writer of the gospel of Luke takes great care to place the story of God's arrival to our world in a way the original audience would have clearly understood. This was done to show Jesus' intimate relationship to the God of the Hebrew scriptures and the history of Israel and the nature and purpose of divine power (versus earthly *Roman* power). It also shows who has a seat at the table and is invited to share in God's kingdom and how Jesus' beloved followers can participate in God's creative and redemptive life in the world.

I love this weird story because it brings everything together in a fantastic and creative way.

Eight days after foretelling his death and resurrection, Jesus hikes up a mountain with his inner circle, who are still processing the shock of hearing their friend and teacher say

he'll be killed by their oppressors. While in that secluded place, Jesus becomes unrecognizable, and his clothes start glowing. Then Moses and Elijah show up to discuss Jesus' upcoming "departure" in Jerusalem. His disciples, after being sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God and witnessing the feeding of thousands—tired and terrified and overshadowed by a cloud—hear a commanding voice from heaven, telling them Jesus is uber-special. Then, everything goes back to normal, and the disciples follow Jesus down the mountain, saying nothing to anyone "in those days".

What a wild rollercoaster! If your first reaction to this amazing and mystical account is one of serious wonderment or skepticism, join the club.

A lot of what's happening in this text could sound familiar, as this story incorporates key characteristics from Israel's historical identity: Moses the deliverer out of Egypt, Law-giver, leader-guide, who goes up the mountain; Elijah, the most beloved prophet, afflict-the-comfortable, miracle-worker, who took on and conquered the prophets from surrounding cultures and their gods. Also, the voice from heaven might remind you of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer, when the heavens were ripped open, revealing Jesus' true identity and declaring his relationship to Creator God (Luke 3:20-22).

So... after this odd experience, the disciples follow Jesus back down the mountain and everything returns to normal... or does it? I believe *the transfiguration* offers a disruptive and healing promise to the church, and to each one of us—a promise we are invited to experience as we practice living into the new life Jesus illuminates for us as God's beloved children and beloved community:

1. Beloved community is open to and longs to be changed by the leading of the Spirit.
2. Beloved community is blessed to participate in Jesus' example to lift the marginalized and speak truth to power.

I see the fruits of our calling to embrace change with hope and creativity every time I drive by Oak Hill Montessori School. You see, that's where Incarnation Lutheran began. Well, sort of.

For my *Leading Christian Community in Mission* class at Luther Seminary, I went through 100 years of archives, and I can tell you: we have a very rich and quite remarkable history that involves two unique and dedicated communities—Apostle's/Mounds View English Lutheran & Bethany Swedish Lutheran—being knit together, co-creating one new and life-giving community of Beloveds.

God enfleshed, joining our world in Jesus the Chosen One, taking on our full human experience, revealing God's ongoing and unshakable presence was the model for this new beloved and transformed community... *Incarnation*. Us... then, now, future.

Regarding the second promise, if you read around the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, the gospel of Luke, where this story is told, is also filled with examples of Jesus shifting the center of power to make us see and connect with those pushed to the outside, made to feel invisible and unworthy by religious and political powers.

The transfiguration is part of a larger story that Luke is telling of God's love for *all people*, not just the "chosen ones" of Israel. At times, the marginalized find their way to Jesus, like the little children who are barely supposed to be seen let alone blessed (Luke 18:15), or the paralytic man lowered through the roof by his friends to the feet of Jesus (Luke 5:17), healing the blind beggar (Luke 18:35). Other times, Jesus brings God's border-crossing love to the outermost margins of society to heal a Roman Centurion's slave (Luke 7:1), eating with Zacchaeus the chief of the much-despised tax-collectors (Luke 19:1), a demon-possessed man from another country, in enemy territory (Luke 8:26).

Often, Jesus' next act is to send the changed people out, back to their community, to spread the good news of God's forgiveness, healing, and wholeness.

Jesus' journey in Luke shows us that whether being restored amidst the bewildered crowd or by healing power rushing to us on the outskirts, or on the top of a mountain, God's love freely gives itself away, takes us to uncomfortable and blessed places to bring wholeness and healing. And in so doing, stands opposed to any earthly power which creates insiders and outsiders.

Maybe that's why this story shows up every year at the end of the season of Epiphany, right before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of our Lenten journey to the cross, as Jesus "sets his face" to go to Jerusalem and ultimately confronts the life-inhibiting systems of power opposed to God's grace and love. Oh, and to conquer death itself!

The disciples are on a bumpy ride as they try to keep in step with the way Jesus is ushering in God's new administration. They may have thought they had him figured out, but then something happens which complicates their vision of what they thought Jesus was all about.

Maybe you can relate to the feeling of amazement and confusion, the mountain-high and valley-low, shifting understandings of who we discover Jesus to be.

This is the rollercoaster the disciples are on – and the journey of faith for us today.

We also are invited to be transformed by God's love – to be hopeful and surprised by the places where God shows up, where God is acting and where God calls us to be. This takes a spirit of openness and anticipation and a leaning into the future. It takes stepping outside of ourselves to be engaged with others and live in community. In this,

we are blessed – more importantly God's love works through us to BE a blessing – unexpected, surprising, transformative, and hopeful.

In Christ we are beloved, we are changed, we are blessed. Then we are sent as a blessing.

Keep sharing that blessing with the world.

--Nate Bergengren, Formation Leader for Students and Families

**Think About** *(select one or more questions)*

- Tell about an experience you had, that you didn't fully understand until later.
- The disciples, like us, are on a rollercoaster journey of faith. What have been some of your valley-low and/or mountain-high experiences?
- What are some of the ways that members of a faith community or others accompanied you on your roller-coaster journey of faith?
- Tell about a time when God surprised you and showed up in an unexpected way. How did that experience change you or change your life?
- What does it mean to you personally to be transformed to be a blessing?
- How does God become more visible to us as we reach out to serve or be in ministry with others?
- What are some ways you have been called to be a blessing? How would others answer this question about you?
- In times of uncertainty, it can be very difficult to lean into the future. What has helped you to move forward in times when the road ahead was not clear? Was your faith part of that journey in either obvious or hidden ways?
- God transforms us when we open our hearts and lives to the possibilities of finding him in the world around us. What helps you to pay attention to where God might be leading?
- Where do you find hope or joy in this Bible story, the written reflection or in your day today?

**Connecting Faith with Daily Life**

*(for individual reflection & action)*

- When we open ourselves to God's Spirit, it's amazing how we see God's presence in the most surprising places. Take a walk in a park, nature preserve, or your neighborhood. As you walk, praise and thank God for all that you see.
- Each morning ask God to help you to be open to surprises and to seeing God in ways you may not have experienced before.
- Make a conscious effort to notice where you have seen God each day and how those "God sightings" have affected your life.

## **Closing**

We started this faith study with *Be Loved...* We are God's beloved. From this place of love, God calls us to befriend others and be part of God's beloved community – in joyful and challenging times. God calls us to be light, be loving, be steadfast, be a blessing. And, returning again, God calls us to remember we are *beloved* and to remember to *be* in God's presence.

- Is there a theme or an idea from this faith study or the small group that you'd like to carry with you?

*Your presence – simply being here – in this group has been a blessing to others!*

## **Closing Prayer**

*Spend time in silence, surrounded by God's love, as the leader (or someone from the group) reads a selection from Psalm 46.*

As we prepare to leave this time together, let's quiet ourselves as we dwell in God's presence. Thank God for the other people in this small group and the time together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to be open to being transformed by God's love.

*Silence*

Be still and know that I am God.      *Silence*

Be still and know.      *Silence*

Be still.      *Silence*

Be.      *Silence*

Amen.

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Thank you to all from the Incarnation community who wrote reflections, questions, prayers, and suggestions for connecting faith and daily life, including former pastor Lynda Thompson for her Bible text introductions and other contributions.

2/7/2022