



**February 18, 2007**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Luke 9:28-36

## “We are all being changed”

Have you ever noticed that profound truths are shared in the comics section of the newspaper? Comics grapple with our deepest questions in life, and do it in a way that transcends our differences. Young, old, kids, adults, rich, poor, liberal, conservative—we read them and chuckle, shaking our heads saying, “Isn’t that the truth?!” A comic strip that really speaks to me is *For Better and For Worse*- and, as you may have noticed, I often reference my favorites in sermons. Family life is pretty accurately depicted there. Some time back there were a series of strips dealing with Elizabeth when she was in elementary school. She decided that her nose was too big. She agonized over it. She tried all kinds of things: sleeping flat on her face, taping it down with adhesive tape- and so on.

Haven’t we all been like Elizabeth at some point in our lives? Remember that feeling of being unacceptable and in need of radical change? Maybe we’ve also been self-conscious about our appearance—or we’ve hated personality quirks we exhibit. Perhaps bad habits we can’t shake lower our self-esteem, or words come out of our mouths that we long to take back. We wish we weren’t so short, tall, loud, shy, or prone to giggle, perspire or blush. We aren’t all we want to be. If only we could change! If only there was a fairy godmother to wave her wand and turn our rags into ball gowns, our froggy selves into princes.

Friends, in the Christian year we have a day that proclaims some special good news. That day is today: the last Sunday after Epiphany, the last Sunday before Lent, when we remember and celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ. The Scripture readings assigned for this day all proclaim the good news: our God is transforming! Those who enter into God’s presence are changed. They shine and glow and radiate something of the Lord’s own power and being.

Jesus experienced this on that mountaintop long ago. And, hidden in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he proclaims: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.*

We are all being changed. This seems too good to be true! Is there REALLY a fairy godmother who can and will wave a wand and change us? Could GOD be the one to do this? If that's true, then why haven't I changed as I've longed to be changed? Is it because God doesn't like me or something? Are there magic words I need to say?

There aren't any magic words. And God is ALWAYS acting to transform us. BUT we have to give God the opportunity to do that.

The story of Jesus on the mountaintop teaches us how to give God an opportunity to change us.

What happened in this story?

First, Jesus went to an out-of-the-way place to pray- to speak and listen to God. He came to discern God's plan for him.

This teaches us that we have to put forth effort and devote time to being with God. The more time we spend, the more opportunity God has to mold and shape us. We are not asked to DESCRIBE THE CHANGES WE WANT, in hopes God will follow our design. We are expected to discover and enter into GOD'S DESIGN.

So, first, put forth effort and give your time to God. He will change you according to HIS plan for you.

Second, stay awake! Jesus was alert, awake, receptive. The three disciples were "weighed down with sleep", but still awake. If they'd be asleep, they'd have seen nothing. They'd have missed a clear revelation of Christ's identity as God's Son.

This teaches us that to encounter God we need to be awake to God's presence. We need to be open to the unexplained, the unanticipated—not set in our ways, or sure that we have faith or life all figured out. Our own certainty can lock us away from God's transforming presence. If we long to be changed—we have to let God change us—allow God to reveal or do something NEW!

To be changed by God, we also need to be honest with God. We need to have the courage to raise questions directly—to name our doubts and struggles. Faith can

only be vital when we grapple with our questions openly. This builds a RELATIONSHIP through which God can work to mold us according to his plan. We may laugh at Peter- about his confusion before Moses and Elijah—but Peter never held back. He was honest and real. And ultimately Jesus told him, “You are the rock on which I will build my church.”

Avoidance of pain and love of comfort can keep us away from God, asleep in a drugged self-hypnosis. We develop defense mechanisms to guard us from any disturbing thoughts. Sometimes I wonder if television might be the biggest culprit in closing the door to God’s transforming activity in our lives. We leave no time, no silence, for God to speak. Our thoughts are continually occupied by entertainment.

We can’t be awake to God’s presence when we are locked up within our own certainties, frozen in fear of naming our doubts honestly to God, or drugged by distractions that numb our pain and keep us comfortable.

Fortunately God’s grace and mercy is always acting to wake us up! Many things in life can jolt us awake. Strangely, sorrow is one. It’s hard to be complacent, to stay stuck in old ways of thinking, to refrain from crying out your doubts when your heart is broken. Sorrow and suffering wake us up- they lead us to stop playing games, to be real with God.

Love wakes us up also. Love among family members, between friends, between partners, husbands and wives. Love wakes our senses to things we never noticed before. Love awakens us to possibilities we never dreamed of.

A sense of need can wake us to God’s presence. Years of following the rules, of living the routines of life half-asleep can wake us to a longing for something MORE. We yearn for something more than what life offers us WITHOUT God. This yearning is a GIFT—that can open our eyes to witness and experience the transforming power of God.

We are always called to a deeper and closer encounter with God. We should EXPECT change. God’s transformation works in two ways, really:

- to ACTUALLY CHANGE us , like a refiner’s fire changes crude ores into precious metals
- AND God changes our VISION, so realities are REVEALED that were formerly invisible to us—as Christ’s transfiguration showed Peter, James and John something NEW about the nature of their friend and teacher, Jesus.

I remember a time when I was aware of being changed in this way—

When I was in seminary there was an informal talent night for both faculty and students. A young woman stood before us to sing—a song she had composed herself, which spoke of her love for God. I didn't know her well—but she seemed nice enough—a regular nice-looking, pleasant young woman.

In the hush of the darkened room, her voice, with no accompaniment, was lifted in song. The melody reached down into my soul and found old, old feelings that had lain stale and buried much too long. Her voice danced and leaped with grace and daring like a trapeze artist high above us all. Her face glowed with a golden light I had never seen. I felt the words of the old hymn speaking for me: “I was blind, but now I see.” I knew I was encountering God through one of his agents of love.

I was changed by that experience—made aware that God IS REALLY AND TRULY present in ordinary people and places. My faith grew stronger—I prayed with more conviction and preached with more excitement.

Encounter with God changes what we see, so that what is real is clear in a way it never had been before. Encounter with God works changes IN US. God's presence is transforming.

Elizabeth of the comic strip met God in a friend—that's how I viewed it. One of her classmates, handing back a spelling test with a bold “A+” printed at the top, confided, “Oh, Elizabeth, I wish I was like you.” Elizabeth couldn't understand how anyone could want to have such a big nose! But friendship gave her new eyes to see, and the mirror reflected a surprisingly nice-looking girl that same day. “I was blind, but now I see.”

In our longings to be different we can trust God. We are all being changed. It's a promise. It's what God DOES! Our willingness to  
-put forth effort,  
-to allow ourselves to be awakened,  
- to draw close to the awesome power and glory of God---  
all nourish God's transforming work.

God calls us to let God work his will. We will see glories we never dreamed of----  
even when we look in the mirror. Even when we look at each other. We are all  
being changed. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Amen.