

Transformation
2 Corinthians 15
February 24, 2019

I took advantage of the rainy weather yesterday (not mention the rain from the day before and the day before that and the day before that and the day before that) and watched a movie. *Saving Private Ryan*, one of my favorite World War II movies, was on tv. It's one of those movies that I just can't help but getting caught up in and watching just about every time it is on. Do you remember this one? It came out in 1998 and it stars Tom Hanks as an Army captain who's platoon is given the assignment of locating Private Ryan, a soldier whose 3 brothers had all been killed in action. The Army orders that Ryan be found and sent home to spare his mother the overwhelming grief of having sacrificed all of her sons in the war.

The movie is considered to be one of the most realistic depictions of the horrors of war ever made. The opening scene is an almost 30 minute long depiction of the storming of the beach at D-Day. And throughout the film, it is unflinching in its betrayal of death and destruction. The movie ends with almost the entire platoon sacrificing their lives to save Private Ryan. The last scene is set in the present day, with the older Ryan visiting the American Cemetery in Normandy. At the captain's grave, he recalls his last words "James, earn this. Earn it." And he wonders if he has lived a life that was worthy of the sacrifices so many men made to save him. Ryan's family assures him that he had indeed earned it.

I first saw *Saving Private Ryan* in the theater when it was originally released. I went to see it on a weekday afternoon. The theater was practically empty. And I was by far the youngest person there. Most of the other people were likely WWII veterans themselves and it was a privilege to sit among them.

I remember when the movie ended that I just couldn't get up and leave. It seemed hard to go back out into the world after the emotionally draining, gut wrenching experience of that movie. It made me grateful for the sacrifices that the greatest generation had made for us and for our country, how they were willing to give their lives for what they believed in. It made me wonder then, and it makes me wonder even to this day, if we have earned it. If we have earned the sacrifices they made for us. It makes me wonder if all of the death and destruction that they experienced has been transformed into something new and better. Has there been a transformation? Has there been a resurrection?

That's the thing about resurrection- it requires death. You can't experience resurrection without first experiencing death. You can't gain a new life without first losing your old life. Last Sunday, I talked about the resurrection of Jesus; about how it is without a doubt a universal truth, something that applies to all people at all times in all places. What Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the resurrection is the very essence of our faith. It is the one thing, above all others, that the church is called to do. That is to proclaim that Christ has been raised from the dead, that the Lord is risen indeed.

The passage from Corinthians that we read today continues with Paul's explanation of the resurrection. In it he gets very specific about what the resurrection will be like. Here he is not talking only about Jesus' resurrection but he is talking about the promise of resurrection, of new life, for all those who believe in Jesus. This morning, I want to look at what the promise of our resurrection means to us and for us.

Apparently, the newly converted Christians in Corinth were wondering what it would be like in the resurrection. They are wondering what kind of body they will have when they are raised from the dead. The answer that Paul gives them is that in the resurrection things are going to be different; they are going to be transformed. The perishable will become imperishable, the dishonorable will become glorious, the weak

will become powerful, the physical will become spiritual. Resurrection is all about transformation. And Christianity is all about resurrection. Therefore, Christianity is all about transformation.

We are getting ready to enter into a season of transformation. In just a few weeks, just a week and a half from now, the season of Lent will begin. We will celebrate Ash Wednesday. It just doesn't seem possible that there are just a few days left until Lent. I'm not sure that I am ready for all of that. I am still feeling Christmas, still celebrating the birth of Jesus, still celebrating the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

I'm not sure that I am ready to enter the wilderness, which is where Jesus' transformation begins. One of the things that we have skipped over in these first weeks of 2019 is the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The way the lectionary is structured is that we spend the first Sundays after Christmas by focusing on the early events of Jesus ministry, from his baptism, to the calling of the disciples, to the first miracles and signs that Jesus performs. But we skip over the 40 days and nights that he spends being tempted in the wilderness.

Even though chronologically it happens immediately after Jesus is baptized, we save his temptation until the first Sunday of Lent. Which is a shame because in the Moravian Church that is a communion Sunday and as such I don't think that we give it the attention that it deserves. It is an important part of Jesus' life and it is essential to his transformation. It is in the wilderness where Jesus truly becomes the one who will bring everlasting life. We can't have the resurrection without the temptation. We can't have the transformation to a new life without confronting the old life.

It's no coincidence that Jesus finds himself in the wilderness immediately after his baptism. Baptism is just the beginning of his ministry. And baptism is just the

beginning of our faith journey. Even though we are baptized, even though our sins are washed away, we will still struggle with them. We will still face temptations. And unlike Jesus, we will succumb to those temptations.

But we can't join Jesus in new life until we come to terms with the old life; until we face the temptations that he did. Those temptations are all around us, the temptation to put God to the test- especially when it seems that God is testing us; the temptation to seek worldly power and authority -rather than seeking God; and the temptation to live on bread alone -and not on the word of God.

These temptations that confront us are same temptations that Jesus faced. We all want to test God; to say things like "Well, God, if this is what you want me to do, then show me by doing this." We all want to test him by not doing what God calls us to do until we think God is doing what we want God to do.

We all want worldly power and authority. Maybe not authority over all the kingdoms of the world but authority over our kingdoms; for others to follow our leading, not God's. And we all want to live on bread alone. For it is much easier to feast on a great meal than on the word of God because the word of God confronts us with who we are and challenges us to become who God created us to be.

It is a little bit easier to think about this today, when we are still a few days away from the season of Lent, from the time of transformation. Today we can think about them more in the abstract, we can think about what we want to do, what we think we might do, rather than actually have to do it. Because it is a lot easier to stay where we are, to not be changed or transformed.

It may sound strange but I think that part of us wants to stay where we are, to maybe we stay in the wilderness. Because despite feeling alone and afraid there, it is

an easy place to be. It is easy to do what we want as opposed to doing what God wants. It's easy to fulfill our desires as opposed to what God desires.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus still found himself in the wilderness, as he prayed: "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me." The easy thing for him to do would have been to get up, gather his disciples, and walk out of the garden, walk away from his betrayal, walk away from the cross, walk away from what God wanted. Yet, Jesus stayed and prayed: "Not what I want but what you want." He continued his journey to the cross, to death, to resurrection, to new life, to transformation.

That is where following the way of God leads us. It leads us out of the wilderness, it leads us away from ourselves, from our thoughts and our ways. It leads us to death. It leads us to resurrection. It leads us to new life, life abundant and life eternal. It leads to transformation.

It may not be easy. In fact, it WILL NOT be easy. It requires work and sacrifice, confession and repentance, change and growth. It requires following the way of God where we die to ourselves and allow God to raise us to new life; a life lived for God, a life lived for others; a life transformed. So, even though it won't be easy, it will be worth it. For we will be transformed.

Our perishable bodies will put on imperishability and our mortal bodies will put on immortality. I don't think we should be like the Corinthians and get so caught up in the specifics, the details of the resurrection, that we lose sight of what it really means, of what it means to be transformed. We can't worry about what kind of bodies we will have in the resurrection because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Through Jesus, through his life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, we are transformed. We are transformed from death into life, from citizens of the kingdom of

the world to citizens of the kingdom of God. And this is a citizenship, a transformation that we don't deserve, that we can't earn, yet Jesus transforms us anyway.

Jesus takes what is perishable, our lives, our bodies, and raises it imperishable. Jesus takes what is dishonorable, our sins, our failures, and is raises them in glory. Jesus takes what is weak, our humanity, our mortality, and raises it in power. Jesus takes our physical bodies, and raises them as spiritual bodies. This is not something that we do, but that he does.

It is not something that we can earn but it is something that when we accept it, we live our lives differently, we live our lives as if we have been transformed, as if we have been given a second chance. Remember Private Ryan, remember how he was challenged to earn the chance that he had already been given, to earn the new life that was placed before him by the sacrifices of so many others? This wasn't something that was given to him because he had already earned it, the sacrifices that his brothers in arms made weren't predicated on his being a good man and living a good life. Rather they challenged him to live his life well and to be a good man BECAUSE of the gift he had been given. They challenged him to allow their deaths to transform his life.

Jesus challenges us in the same way. Our citizenship in the kingdom of God, our salvation, our resurrection, our transformation is not something that we can earn. It is a gift that is given to us through the death of Jesus. As we pray in the baptism liturgy- "We were buried with him (Jesus) through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glorious power of God Almighty, we too might be raised to live a new life."

So we live our lives as if they are new. That is what our resurrection means to us and for us. It means living the best life that we can, being the best people that we can. It means living as though we have been transformed. Because we have been

transformed. From perishable to imperishable, from physical to spiritual, from weak to powerful, from dishonorable to glorious.

So we live our lives, not trying to earn our resurrection, to bring about our transformation. But we live our lives because we have already been transformed and we are confident, we are SURE, that we will be resurrected. We live our lives for Jesus and we transform our world for Jesus because Jesus because Jesus gave his life for us.