

“Proclaim Transformation”

In the Conference Minister’s most recent Conference Newsletter article, **Rev. Dr. Don Longbottom, our Conference Minister**, wrote, “February 17, 1980, was an exciting day in the life of the Longbottoms. Jason Robert Longbottom came bursting into this world. He was a smiling baby and well cared for by his mother. Jason made the fourth child and I undertook the necessary alterations to ensure no more children.

June 26th, 1980, we lost Jason. It was harsh, devastating and final. I was 29 years of age and count that day as the beginning of my adulthood. Grief is a funny thing in that it comes and goes. Time helps but grief is not entirely chronological. Sometimes a sound, a smell, a song can bring the past into collision with the present.” **“But somehow, thankfully, the Spirit can transform the moment.”**

My youngest son **Joseph**, a wonderful musician and school principal, would never have existed but for the passing of Jason and the intervention of modern medicine. So, 40 years later, Lennon James Longbottom, son of Joseph and Irene, was born the night before Jason’s birthday. Do you believe in coincidence? ...”

“Joseph is a good and decent man and I am thankful beyond words. Here comes the weird piece. Even if I had the power, I would not change the events that led to his birth.” **“Life is indeed a circle of mortality and resurrection. I have no way to explain ... so I trust God.”** [“The Mosaic on the Wall” by Rev. Dr. Don Longbottom, Conference Minister (February 20, 2020 South Central Conference Newsletter)]

As the Spirit **“transformed”** Dr. Don’s life following the loss of his baby son, Jason, and then through the birth of his last born, Joseph, so also has his **“trust in God”** been reaffirmed by the birth of Joseph’s son 40 years to the day before the birthday of his deceased baby son, Jason. As Longbottom wrote, “Life is indeed a circle of mortality and resurrection.”

“Transformation”, **“Trust in God”**, and **“Death and Resurrection”** were all very much part of the Transfiguration of Jesus in our Gospel Lectionary Reading. Matthew, Mark, and Luke provided an account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Unfortunately, Matthew did not include a description of what Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah. However, Luke did include that in his account. In Luke 9:30-31 it was reported, **“Suddenly, two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfill God’s Purpose by dying in Jerusalem.”** So, Luke’s source understood that the Transfiguration of Jesus was connected to God’s “Purpose” – Jesus going to Jerusalem to die.

Although Matthew did not provide that information, he did report, prior to Jesus taking the three disciples up the mountain, he was going to Jerusalem to suffer, to be put to death, and to be raised back to life. So, in context, the Transfiguration of Jesus was very much impacted by Jesus’ fulfillment of **“God’s Purpose”** through his **“Death in Jerusalem”**.

That may seem a bit strange, since the whole Transfiguration Scene is thought of as a “Glorious” one. One might ask, **“Where is the ‘Glory’ in going to Jerusalem to die?”** To answer that question, I believe it is helpful to look at a section of the Gospel of John. John did not include the same story of the Transfiguration of Jesus but, I would contend, he did report another Event toward the conclusion of Jesus’ Public Ministry, which has much the same purpose. It may well be that the sources for Matthew, Mark, and Luke, mistakenly put what John described in a different setting, as reported in their gospels, instead of the way John reported Jesus’ special “Mountain Top” experience in Jerusalem. John wrote in **John 12:20-24, 27-32**, **“Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, ‘Sir, we want to see Jesus.’ Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. ... Now my heart is troubled — and what shall I say? Shall I say, ‘Father, do not let this hour come upon me’? But that is why I came — so that I**

might go through this hour of suffering. Father, bring glory to Your Name!” Then a voice spoke from heaven, ‘I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again.’ The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, ‘An angel spoke to him!’ But Jesus said to them, “It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours. Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” Clearly, Jesus understood and proclaimed there would be a tremendous “Transformation” related to his fulfilling “God’s Purpose” of him dying in Jerusalem.

Further, the “glory” Jesus sought was not what glory seekers today are after, instead, through his suffering, Jesus was fulfilling God’s Purpose. That brings us to the “**Transformation**” part of the Transfiguration Event. **How was God’s Purpose going to be carried out through Jesus’ Death in Jerusalem?** There have been many answers proposed for that question. For those, who seek works righteousness, Jesus’ Death was the payment required for their forgiveness, along with their deserving it through their living a righteous life, such as fulfilling God’s Commandments. According to the popular societal understanding, that works righteousness’ interpretation tends to be the answer to the question about what Jesus’ Death was to accomplish.

However, there is another answer, which Jesus revealed during his Ministry, Death, and Resurrection. That answer might be summed up as: **God’s Purpose for sending Jesus to Jerusalem to die was to provide proof of God’s Agape Love and Forgiveness for us and all people.** Jesus the Christ came into this world to reveal God’s Love for us, our Divine Parent’s Forgiveness of us, God’s Invitation into the New Faith Relationship with God, and the Almighty’s Welcome of us into that New Relationship and New Life in Christ. Unfortunately, we human beings are often stubborn and unwilling to accept such Good News without compelling proof of its validity. **God’s Proof of God’s Purpose revealed God wants to Liberate us from our bondage to Sin and Death and to Invite and Welcome us into the New Relationship and New Life.** All that came at the cost of God’s Own True Son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus was and is the embodiment of God’s Agape – Suffering and Self-Giving Love for us and All People. **God’s Purpose in Jesus Christ was to convince us to accept our Liberation from Sin and Death – to accept God’s Forgiveness, Invitation to be part of the New Faith Relationship with God, and the New Life demonstrated in Jesus’ Public Ministry, Death, and Resurrection.**

Who are you, Jesus? Some may doubt such a sacrifice by God was needed to convince humanity. However, Jesus performed many miracles, including raising Lazarus and others from the dead, and yet, many still did not believe him to be God’s Son – the Messiah. **The greatest possible expression of the Almighty’s Agape Love for us and All People was and is God’s Only Son. That Truth is what sets us free!**

Who are you? The Transfiguration in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and the “Mountain Top Experience” of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John point to Jesus’ Death in Jerusalem as that Proof of God’s Purpose, and thus, lead us with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to be **Transformed!** We are Transformed to Trust God’s Agape Love for us – that God has Forgiven Us, Invited, and Welcomed Us into the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Jesus Christ. **That New Life calls for us to let God’s Glory show through us – let God’s Self-Giving Agape Love be lived out in our daily lives – live as Citizens of God’s Kingdom already on earth.** That is why God spoke to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration and in John’s account of the Voice from Heaven responding to Jesus in Jerusalem. We are to listen to that Voice – to God and to **Proclaim Transformation** to others both with our Agape Love Guided Lives and our Words of God’s Invitation and Welcome. Proclaim God’s Transformation! Amen.