

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF JESUS

Randall Tremba

March 15, 2015

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

\* \* \*

### Numbers 21:4-9

*And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."*

### John 3:14-21

*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in this one may have eternal life—abundant, joyous, wholesome life—here and now.*

*For God so loved the world that God gave her only Son, so that everyone who believes in that one may not perish—spoil or rot like fruit here and now—but may have eternal life here and now. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved—healed, liberated, made whole here and now—like those snake bitten, sick and dying souls in the desert.*

*God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved.*

If you take nothing else away today, please take this: God does not condemn the world or anyone in it, including you or your worst enemy. God does not condemn. God doesn't have to. We do that well enough all by ourselves. And from that, too, we need to be saved.

\* \* \*

Twenty some years ago I read *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* by Marcus Borg. I was amazed and, thereafter, began reading most everything Borg wrote, including *The Meaning of Jesus* and most recently *Jesus: Uncovering the life of a Religious Revolutionary*.

Marcus Borg died this past January and since then everyone of my sermons has featured Jesus. *The Faith of Jesus. The Healing Touch of Jesus. The Mission of Jesus.* And last week *The Vision of Jesus* in contrast to the vision of ISIS. And today *The Transformation of Jesus*.

You might say I've become obsessed with Jesus. But not to worry; I'll get over it—as should a lot of Christians. For ultimately it's not about Jesus, it's what we see through Jesus that matters. If we only focus on the finger pointing to the stars we will never see the stars.

In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus is called "Son of God" and "Son of Man." Those phrases literally mean one who reveals or embodies the characteristics of humanity and divinity. And in this case, not separately, but as one. Humanity and divinity as one.

Jesus is that.

Jesus points to that.

Jesus can also be seen as a lens or window. The idea is not to look at the window but through the window.

Far too many Christians obsess over and quarrel over the status of the glass and never get round to actually seeing the view through it. The glass becomes an end in itself. It's possible to turn the historic Jesus into an idol. And many have.

But Jesus points beyond himself.

One thing Borg and other scholars help us notice is that the perception and identity of Jesus actually evolved over time. You can see it in the pages of the New Testament itself. Within a matter of a few years, Jesus of Nazareth transforms into the Cosmic Christ—in and through whom all things exist and cohere.

How did Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, transform into that?

As it turns out, the historic Jesus is a seed that falls upon our hearts. What happens next depends on the beholder, the one who holds the seed.

Which only goes to show that just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is the beloved Christ. It's not just what's in the pages of the Bible, or what Jesus was historically, it's what's in us that transforms the seed or doesn't.

The historic Jesus must die. Jesus is like a seed that dies within our hearts waiting to resurrect into a beloved community. There's more than one way to understand the resurrection of Jesus and that's one. The Spirit of Jesus arose in a believing which is to say a *be-loving* community.

In the gospel before us this morning Jesus has blossomed or transformed into something far greater than the historic Jesus of Nazareth. Apparently, those who came to believe Jesus saw more in him than he saw in himself. That's the way love is.

So in this particular gospel—written 70 some years after Jesus—the humble, little known rabbi from the hick town of Nazareth, has become—are you ready for this—the Word of God that created all things, the light of the world, bread from heaven, lamb of God, God's temple, Good shepherd, the way, the truth, the life, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending, the Only Begotten Son of God, not just a child of God but the only, most beautiful, only begotten child of God.

All of that, by the way, is the language of love and devotion; not the language of science or journalism. When I say my grandson Wyatt is the most beautiful child in the world, that is the language of love and devotion. It's not one bit scientific. I did not take a poll. So if you want you can take all such language in the Bible with a grain of skepticism—and still believe.

So for us in our tradition, nothing compares to this One we call Jesus. And to think this One is you; this One is me; for did not this One say: We are one. I am in you as you are in me as we are all in the Father, which is also the Mother and which also is love. For those who abide in love abide in God. And round and round it goes. The gospel of John is so much fun—if it doesn't give you a headache first.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so the sick and dying could be saved, so must the Son of Man, the Human One, be lifted up.

When you feel nothing but condemnation, look up. When you feel nothing but despair, look up. When you feel nothing but sadness and grief, look up. When you feel all is lost, look up.

Which is to say: Lift up your heart to the One at the center of your heart. Lift up your heart to pure unbounded love.

God so loved the world—the whole world—not just the Jewish world, or Christian world, or Muslim world, or religious world, or red, blue, yellow, black, or white world, or just the rich world or poor world.

God so loved the whole damn world that God gave the most precious gift of all. And in a word, the gift is love.

And love does not condemn.

Love saves, love forgives, love heals, love makes all things new. A new creation over and over again. Love transforms.

And that kind of love is simply divine.

\* \* \*

*Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes. You are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

**Teresa of Ávila.**