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In This Way...Transform

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It was a long time ago, in a land far, far away. I was 10 years old. It was Christmas morning. One of the last gifts I opened that morning was a book. A small book entitled "God's Smuggler." The author, Brother Andrew, was a Dutch Christian missionary famously known for smuggling Bibles into communist countries during the Cold War. I told you it was a long time ago. Brother Andrew was nicknamed "God's Smuggler." That's the kind of title that catches the attention of a ten-year-old kid. But just below the title was this line: "When [Andrew] crossed the armed borders of the Iron Curtain, would he be lucky – or dead?" I couldn't put it down. What kind of adventure is this? What kind of person smuggles Bibles into dangerous, no-bible zones? When will Tom Clancy turn this into a movie?

But then, like you do with a good book with a good cover, you turn it over. And what I read there gave my 10-year-old body goosebumps: Andrew is driving his bright blue Volkswagen Beetle from Austria into what was then Yugoslavia. He stops just short of the border crossing. Armed guards approach his car, which is bulging with bibles and study materials. Brother Andrew is wondering how he's going to get all of this past the guards who are about to search his car and go through his luggage. That's when Brother Andrew prayed. He prayed for the very first time what would become known as the Prayer of God's Smuggler:

"Lord, in my luggage, I have Scripture that I want to take to Your children across this border. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see."

Andrew prayed, and the guards allowed his car bulging with Bibles across the Yugoslavian border. That was the beginning of Brother Andrew's mission to bring God's Word to worshipers cut off from their religion. It was a mission loaded with peril and risk, financed by faith and supported by miracles.

There was something in that whole story in general and in that kind of praying that was transforming for

the 10-year-old version of Paul Gauche. I don't think it would be hyperbole to say that my view of prayer today was first informed by the way Brother Andrew prayed all those years ago.

We're in a Lenten worship series that we're calling "In This Way..." we've been exploring the ways that Jesus taught His followers to pray. Pray in this way; Jesus said: Be Open [week 1] to the ways God is working in your life. Pray in this way, Jesus said: Be together [week 2]. Pray in this way, Jesus said: Ask for what you need [week 3]. Pray in this way, Jesus said: Center [week 4]. Today, Jesus calls us to pray in this way... expecting to be transformed.

The story that we're looking at today is the story of the Transfiguration. It's a story of transformation. But the transformation isn't just what happened to Jesus in Luke's telling of it in chapter 9. The transformation is in what that story has to say to us today. And that story is found in Luke 9:28-36.

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. This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As always, there's a lot going on here. Let's take a closer look and then explore what this has to teach us. Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan. He returns to His home community to preach and teach. He calls together His followers—most of

them fishermen—and teaches them a different way to fish. He heals the sick, raises the dead, and models for His followers the importance of forgiving the seemingly unforgivable, loving the seemingly unlovable, welcoming the stranger, and showing extravagant mercy to all who feel like outsiders. And now this: as if all of that wasn't mind-blowing enough, the transfiguration.

Transfiguration is not a word that we use much at all; it doesn't roll off the tongue so readily. And it's just such a strange story that we don't talk about a lot. The disciples didn't talk about it either—Luke even tells us that! Jesus is utterly changed; His appearance is completely altered. Peter, James, and John are standing there watching this—their mouths hanging open like they'd just seen something that defies description because, well, it did. And then, as if that's not enough, a voice from heaven—God's voice says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!" Finally, Luke ends this story with one of the most perplexing statements in the Christian Scriptures: The disciples—Peter, James, and John "kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen." It is a strange story. But like so many biblical stories, somehow, the stranger they are, the more they have to teach. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we'll get the point.

Here's what I know...even though transfiguration doesn't show up in most of our conversations, most—if not all of us desperately long for what the transfiguration of Jesus means for us. As we continue to learn to pray, when Jesus says, "In this way – pray" for transformation, we see what takes place in Jesus' life as something that can take place in our lives as well. The Transfiguration refers to the change in Jesus' appearance. The #bigmoneyword for this is "theophany!" God, being revealed in the person of Jesus, is a bold reminder that God is always showing up and being revealed in our lives.

When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation, we can expect that God will show up in our lives. When that happens, transformation takes place and the brokenhearted are healed, the lost are found, the outsiders are invited in, the outcasts are welcomed, the darkness becomes

light, and the transformation of our lives is completely possible.

Every one of us carries deep in our souls a desire for some kind of transformation in our lives. If you've ever wrestled with the weight of feeling hopeless, struggled through the pain of trying to heal a hurting relationship, wrestled with the fear of a serious health issue, or felt like you were suffocating under the weight of broken dreams, wondering what the future holds, you know what it's like to long for transformation in your life. The transfiguration of Jesus is a powerful reminder that with God, there are no more dead ends. With God, there is no more darkness. With God, there is hope and healing, grace and mercy, life and aliveness. Because of the transfiguration of Jesus, transformation is possible. This leads to an important question: What is it in your life that needs transformation?

When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation, what is it that you pray will be transformed? For some of us, it may be how we understand—or how we "see" Jesus. The disciples thought they knew Jesus. But with the transfiguration, they saw Jesus in a totally new light—no pun intended. Maybe there's a narrative in your life about who Jesus is and what "following Jesus" means, and somehow, all of that—for one reason or another just sucks the life right out of you. Maybe "following Jesus" has been all about measuring up. Maybe it's been all about fitting in. Maybe "following Jesus" has been all about trying to jump through a series of hoops and rules and regulations. Maybe it's been all about behaving and struggling to believe in an attempt to fit in and belong. Friends, that is not the narrative of the scriptures. Shame and guilt never led anyone to transformation.

When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation, he's asking you to trust the power of the presence of Jesus in your life. Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah—God's son, God—in the flesh. No longer hidden, no longer "out there somewhere," no longer disconnected from your life, but fully present, fully alive, fully for you, fully in you, fully God.

When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation, Jesus is creating transformation in

you! And when that transformation begins to take hold, things begin to stir. A movement begins, momentum increases, and expressions of the Kingdom of God remind us that God is up to something in the world, our world, in us. And then it really gets interesting!

It's almost bizarre that the disciples who witnessed this incredible appearance of Jesus told absolutely no one else about it! Usually, when we see something remarkable that stirs us, moves us, amazes us, we can't wait to tell someone else. Our vacation goes up on Meta. Our meal at that new restaurant gets posted on Snapchat, and an afternoon with our kids or grandkids gets liked and liked some more on Instagram or Snapchat. When our team wins the game or the tournament, we #hashtag all over twitter.

But not here in Luke's gospel. And not because the disciples didn't have social media. They had social media—it was called "word-of-mouth," and it was very effective in the first century. But Jesus' followers just went silent. And we're left to wonder why. Were they afraid? Did they think others wouldn't believe them or, worse, think they were nuts? Did they think that their lives would somehow be in danger? What kept them in silence? Perhaps it's the same thing that keeps us silent about our experience of God. We attend a remarkable worship service, but we go to work the next day and say nothing. We have this incredible experience at Student Ministry, but when we return to school, we remain silent. We sense God speaking to us through scripture or music, or a message, but we keep the experience to ourselves. Why is that? Are we afraid that we'll be ridiculed?

When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation, Jesus is giving us the opportunity to be both challenged and equipped to speak or begin to learn to speak about our faith in ways that can be heard in the world around us.

We know this: stories transform us. When we tell stories about what God is up to in our lives, that's transformational. When we tell the stories that connect the dots between faith and real life, that transfigures the hearts and lives of others. When we tell stories about how people have been impacted through Feed My Starving Children Mission Outpost, or the Dental Clinic, that's

transformational; that transfigures people's hearts. When we tell stories about how something we learned in our small group gave us confidence, or how taking time to listen to a friend renewed their hope, or what happened when you offered to pray for someone before they went into surgery—that's transformational! That transfigures people's hearts and lives! **When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation,** Jesus is inviting us into a partnership of movement and momentum that can impact everything. That's what happened when Brother Andrew prayed his now-famous prayer, acknowledging that God is at work making the impossible possible! His prayer absolutely transformed the life of a 10-year-old version of the kid standing in front of you today.

So, what does this mean for moving forward? This is about responding **When Jesus says, In This Way ... pray ... for transformation.** The Good news is that we don't have to wonder if God will show up. God shows up. So, when God shows up, we get to pray for the ability to tell the story of God's transformational work in us and through us. This is about being a part of the movement. This is about talking about the Spirit's momentum. This is about expressing love and gratitude and hope and giving thanks that God is up to all kinds of things in the world—in your world—whether it's evident or not. This is about recalling the movement and momentum of God among us.

So today, let's make a commitment to pray for transformation in either your life or the life of someone you know – or both.