

2 Peter 1:16-21

CROSS-EYED

When you think about it, it seems that all advertisements are based around creating a desire for transformation. It might be a transformation of how others see us, or how we see ourselves. It might be about transforming the level of our wealth, or at least how much money we will have to spend from day to day. The ads could be targeted towards a desire to transform our levels of comfort, what we experience, or how much we know and understand about our world and what is happening around us. The more I think about these ads, their slogans, what they offer and promise, the more I think that they are focused on and centred around creating a desire to bring about a transformation in some part of our lives.

The day we celebrate today in the Church, Transfiguration, is also very much about transformation; not just of Jesus, but also of us. As Jesus is about to begin His journey to die on the cross in Jerusalem, He did what He often did; He went away to pray to His Father for strength and guidance in what He was about to go through. Taking three disciples with Him, Peter, James, and John, Jesus went up on a mountain to pray. While they were there, the disciples saw Jesus transformed into a figure of dazzling white, and two of the great prophets from the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, joined Him. They also heard the voice of God Himself say, “This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.” (17b)

One of those eyewitnesses, Peter, shares the details of this account in a letter some years later, as a way to tell his readers that the things they have heard about Jesus are not made up stories; he was there, he saw it. And the story he and others now pass on to us gives us a good means of transition, of transformation, as we move on from the seasons of light, glory, and hope of Christmas and Epiphany, and begin our own focus on the cross in the season of Lent. It’s a time to shift our focus from being full of glory and wonder at God coming into the world as a tiny baby, and on to the life and mission of Jesus coming to walk the road of the cross for us.

The transfiguration is a story of transformation. It is about not only how Jesus was physically transformed on that day back then, but how we are also transformed by God's love, by all that Jesus did for us, still today. What happened in Jesus, through love and obedience, taking the road to the cross, giving up His life for our forgiveness, it changes our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the world. Now, through the cross, we look at all these relationships differently, and so we also act and respond in them differently. As Peter puts it here, Jesus helps us to fully accept the message we hear in the Old Testament, the message of God's love and forgiveness offered for everyone. And so, this message, the message of God's love for us, the message which we see when look at the story of God and His people through the cross, it becomes, as Peter calls it, a lamp shining in a dark place.

Moving to look now through the cross transforms our relationship with God. No longer do we need to worry if we have done enough to earn His love. No longer do we have to wonder how much He loves us. In the cross God shows us that He kept the promise He made right back when Adam and Eve first sinned, sending Jesus to be the Saviour to pay for our sins and bring us back to Him. At the Transfiguration, the voice of God says, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him" (17b), words which gave strength to Jesus for the road He was about to embark on. In our baptism we hear and experience God's love and acceptance for us, as we have God's name put on us, just as Jesus commanded, as we are baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our relationship with God is restored, it is transformed, by looking at it through the cross. Because in Jesus God showed how great His love is for us, we can know that His love and forgiveness are there for us whenever we turn to Him.

And because of this, we are also transformed in how we can now look at ourselves. If we are worthy of Jesus dying on the cross for us, we are truly valuable. As we see ourselves as being of so much value in God's eyes that He will do whatever He can to have a relationship with us, this can change how we see ourselves, the way we choose to live, the choices we make in response to this. It reminds me of Martin Luther's statement whenever things were against

him and getting him down, 'But I am baptised!' In other words, 'I belong to God, God loves and values me. That is my identity and nothing can change it'. How do you go with that? Is it how you always feel? When you are able to focus on God's love for you how does that change how you see yourself and how you live that out?

Following on from this, looking at others through the cross changes how we see them also. Think about people who may sometimes annoy you, or frustrate you, or at least get under your skin a bit. Now, remind yourself that each one of those people, in some cases whether they know it or not, is someone Jesus came to die for. Looking at these people Cross-Eyed, how does that change the way you see them, react to them, treat them? Not always easy, is it, but that's when the power of God's love which we read about in this reading comes in. Ask for God's help and guidance for those times when you find this difficult to do. Try to remember the great love, forgiveness, and acceptance God shows to you, and by looking at people through the cross ask for God's help to show it to others.

Being Cross-Eyed also transforms the way we look at the world. It's easy to get caught up on the negatives: the violence, selfishness, even natural disasters. Bad news sells, knee-jerk reactions are what we want from our leaders in this day of instant news and response, so those things are what we are normally given. It's easy to see only hopelessness around us, to feel that the world is covered in darkness. A theme through the last 5 or so weeks of Epiphany has been the light of God coming into the world in Jesus, and Peter touches on that here again today also by referring to the message of Jesus being a lamp shining in the darkness. Jesus has come to bring light into the world. We as God's people are a part of that happening. When we look at the world and all its people through the cross, we see hope in God's love and forgiveness for everyone. We are able to see not just the doom and gloom, but also the many ways God shows His love to everyone, and the ways people pass on this love. In seeing God's love and presence in the world, both in Creation, in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit at work, we can see the positives, the way forward, and also be open to the call we have to be a part of this. Each one of us, where

we are, in the lives we live, the relationships we have, the things we can do and the change we can be a part of, can be a part of the transformation God continues to work towards for this world and all who live in it.

If ads are all about new ways of looking at ourselves and others, changes, transformation, then what God did through Jesus on the cross in showing His love is the greatest advertisement of all. As we begin this season of Lent, we are reminded that we are all now called to be Cross-Eyed; to look at our relationship with God, how we see ourselves, how we view and relate to others, to view all of these through the love and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. After the Transfiguration, Jesus went down from the mountain, sure in God's love, to do what He had been called and sent to do. Being sure of that same love, through our transformation and Cross-Eyed view, we can go out to live transformed and to be transforming also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about the ads you see, hear, or read. What kinds of transformations are they each telling people they need?
- Being Cross-Eyed causes us to look at our relationship with God differently. What difference does God showing His love in Jesus make in your life? What changes does it make to you? Are there any changes or responses you feel you are called to make but find it difficult to do so?
- Being Cross-Eyed causes us to look at ourselves differently. How is your identity, self-worth, how you live out your callings and vocations, based on and in the love God shows you in Jesus? Are there times you allow your self-worth or identity to be shaped by people, circumstances and things rather than God's love for you?
- Being Cross-Eyed causes us to look at others differently. How does looking at each person as someone God loves, and who Jesus died for, change the way you react to and respond to them? How does it change the value you put on each person?
- Being Cross-Eyed causes us to look at the world differently. What light does the love of God in Jesus bring into the world? As someone who knows that light, how are you called to share that transforming light as part of God's work?
- Are there any parts of this which you struggle with? If so, bring these struggles to God in prayer, and, if needed, find someone you can talk these things through with.

Pray: thank God for His transforming love in Jesus in our world and our lives. Ask Him to help us to be Cross-Eyed as we live as His loved and saved people each day.

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