

It's transfiguration Sunday.

It's Valentine's Day.

Transformational love.

We aren't talking about romantic

Chocolate and flowers kind of love,

Not that there's anything wrong with

A little bit of chocolate.

Today, together, as the churches

Of Regina,

We are exploring love that changes life,

That transfigures us,

That shapes who we are

And whose we are.

There's lots we can say

About the gospel story.

For example,

The transfiguration story in Mark's gospel

Falls in right in the middle of

Jesus's ministry time line –

Marking the center between

Jesus' baptism and his resurrection.

We see the disciples being

So terrified by what they are experiencing

That they really aren't sure what to do.

Peter decides that the right action

Is to build some shelters so that Jesus
And the prophets could have a comfy place to be.
God's voice comes from heaven,
Reminding all of us, audiences of Mark's time,
And audiences of our time,
That Jesus is beloved.

The disciples are commanded
To listen to all that Jesus has told them
And to believe,
No matter how hard the news is
Or how much they don't want it to be true.

While that is good and fine,
I found myself mulling over the word "beloved."
You see, commentators have said
That at this moment,
With the glowing clothes, long dead prophets,
And heavenly voices,
The disciples that are there finally,
Finally see the divinity, the spark of God,
In Jesus.
But more than that,
They hear God affirm
God's love for Jesus as he is...
Which is human.

God's beloved is a human
With foibles and quirks,
With emotions and intelligence,
With gifts and mistakes,
Who houses the God spark
And makes it manifest in his ministry.
This is where Beloved
Catches my attention.
You see, if God loves Jesus
In his humanity,
And transfigures,
Transforms Jesus by this love,
Then maybe, just maybe,
That same transformational love is
Also shared with us.

Mountaintop theophanies aside,
There are moments in our lives,
Where we come to understand
Or witness the transformational love of the Holy.
Recently, I had the privilege of hearing one such story.
Two weeks ago,
I participated in a virtual conference,
where I was honoured to hear
Jesse Thistle speak.

Jesse is a Metis-Cree from Prince Albert, Sk
Who is an assistant professor
In Metis Studies at York University,
And is the author of “From the Ashes”.
His book tells the heart rending and heart warming
story of Jesse’s journey from a life of homelessness, addiction and crime,
to sobriety, love and education.
It’s a powerful, and honest story of resilience,
Spirit and reconnection.

I mention Jesse Thistle because
As I was thinking about what to preach
On today,
I found myself being drawn
Back to a story that Jesse told
Those of us participating in the conference.
Jesse spoke of love,
And how the loss of love had an irrevocable
And devastating affect on him and his brothers.
He had been abandoned by his parents,
And the love that had been rightfully his
Had been taken from him.
He and his brother’s lived with his grandparents,
But because of their heartbreak over the loss
Of their only son, Jesse’s dad,

They weren't able to love the boys fully,
Even though they tried.

Jesse says "love was a very foreign country to him growing up."

This lack of love in childhood
Meant that Jesse wasn't able to establish
Loving relationships in his youth and adulthood.
He was scared of love, afraid it didn't really exist,
He built a wall around himself,
Keeping others and the world at a safe distance,
Never trusting enough to love.

But slowly things changed for Jesse,
He said: "the mustard seed of love started small"
While detoxing in solitary confinement in 2006,
All Jesse had with him was an indestructible suicide dress
(made of material that wouldn't tear)
And a prison issued Bible.
The first few days of withdrawal were brutal,
The physical and mental anguish seemingly unending.
As he thrashed about in his cell,
He managed to bump a nearby table,
Knocking the Bible to the floor,
Where it fell open to Psalm 32.
Jesse knew, he said, that in that moment, God was with him
"Even as I hated him,

Or it,
Or whatever it is,
For putting me through absolute hell through
All my young life.
A deep rage filled me at first:
Rage at creation,
Rage at God,
Rage at addictions,
Rage at myself.
But that soon burned away,
Like all rage does,
Into sorrow.
A great great sorrow that
Swallowed me whole.
A great sorrow beyond sorrows.
Then slowly after my destructions,
A peace came,
Washed over me and told me
That I was loved even
As I knew the world didn't.
And I just knew this somehow.
And I am not a religious man
By any stretch of the word,
Nor was I raised that way.
But I cannot deny what happened in that cell.

I just can't.
Everything just came alive
All of a sudden,
The colours,
The smells,
The life around me.
Maybe it was the affects of being sober
For the first time in my life,
But I dunno know.
But I still think it is real,
Even as I look back at it now.
To this point, a while later,
I found the courage in my heart
To try again,
I spoke to the chaplain and started again
Down the long path to literacy,
That started with my GED.”

There in solitary confinement,
Jesse was shown
That he indeed was beloved
And loved as he was.
This love,
Creator's love,
Gave Jesse the courage to

Take the steps needed to
Make changes in his life –
Most of all, Jesse says:
“In time I learned to love myself in rehab,
As Creator was showing me to-
Education,
Learning to take care of myself,
And staying sober...
All of that grew out of that love I was shown.”

While it wasn't on a mountain top,
And Jesse didn't take on a glow,
He was affirmed as beloved
Creator showed him the love
That he believed would never be his.
This is the kind of love
That is affirmed in Jesus.
And it is the same kind of Love
That is given to us,
Time and again by the God
Who meets us where we are
And affirms our beloved-ness.

On this Transfiguration/Valentine's Day
We remember that love,
the love that meets us where we are

the love that is given to us freely,
the love that transforms us
reminding us that each of us
is God's own beloved.
Maybe it sounds naïve,
Or maybe it's my deep hope,
But this is at the heart of the transfiguration –
A love that finds us on the mountain top,
And in the valleys,
And in all the places in between.
When we open ourselves to the reality
Of this love,
We are transformed,
We are transfigured,
And we glow with the truth of
God's love with us.
Thanks be.