

February 11, 2018

Today's sermon is 22 years in the making. It begins with my move to Wausau as a rent to own priest and being elected permanent rector one year later. I doubt anyone thought "permanent" would mean over 22 years!

I was recently asked my thoughts when I arrived. I was scared, to tell you the truth. St John's didn't look like an easy place. So I listened to the stories of members, and read everything about the church I could.

And most important, I asked if we could walk together, as priest and parish family. Little did I imagine the relationship that would be born out of those beginnings.

So, today is a celebration. It is a celebration of those relationships we have created and cared for in our walk together. It is a celebration of the power of relationships to change lives. It is a celebration of the power of love to transform working relationships into friendships. And it is a celebration of the power of relationships to change the world we live in.

Our celebration stands against the backdrop of today's gospel story of the Transfiguration.

Jesus' transfiguration was the culmination of a walk begun at the Sea of Galilee, when a handful of fishermen were invited by Jesus to walk with him. With each teaching, miracle, parable spoken, mile walked, meal shared, or moment spent in quiet, relationships were being born, lives being changed. In short, a transfiguration was taking place, all through the relationships being nurtured.

What happened on the mountain that day did not happen in isolation. It was a celebration of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, a

relationship born at the beginning of time. It was a celebration of the relationship between Jesus, Peter, James and John. And through those relationships, the glory of God shone on that day. Past, present and future came together as one.

Relationships provided the ground for lives to be changed, for God's glory to find a home among on that mountain, for the Transfiguration of Jesus and his friends. No wonder Peter could come down from the mountain and declare that Jesus was Lord and Messiah!

Today is our moment on the mountain. Today is our celebration of relationships. Today, past, present and future come together as one, as we witness God's love and glory working among us.

Today, we celebrate the power of our relationships to transfigure us, so that we reflect the glory of God in what we do, and who we are. Today is the day we can declare that because of Christ, we are the children of God, and because of our relationship to Christ, we are in relationship to each other as brothers and sisters.

Because of our relationship with Christ, and through Christ with each other, we have sought to share God's glory with others. We have sought new relationships with the world we live in.

We have unlocked the chapel and opened the courtyard. We have welcomed the stranger, fed the hungry, all while maintaining a commitment to care for one another.

There is one story I want to share with you that tells how much relationship has invited the power of God's love to change us.

I remember when the vestry met at Claire and Doug's home for our first vestry retreat. At that meeting we decided to host a monthly meal for the community. The biggest obstacle we faced was whether or not to use the church china and silverware!

With no relationship there was no trust. But people were willing to take a chance, for the sake of building relationship, and inviting God to be part of this community. 22 years later, how many meals, how many people have been served on that china and silverware!

More importantly, how many lives have been changed because of the relationships created, and how many lives have been changed through the outreach lunch?

When Jesus left the mountain with his friends, they would be heading towards Jerusalem.

There, Jesus would be taken from them, and they would begin a journey that ultimately led to the birth and spread of the Church.

Today, we know that when we leave this mountain which is our celebration, we will be taking different paths. I will no longer be the rector of St John's, Wausau. The moment takes us into the unknown, both in terms of the larger picture of what will happen with St John's, but also what will happen to our relationships between you, and me, and Marilyn?

Relationships that have grown in many instances to friendships? Relationships, that in the words of the gospel for today, have been transfigured in the presence of God's glory?

There are relationships, and there are friendships, outside of church, even for priests.

The relationships born out of our walk not necessarily end. Obviously, we will not have the same relationships. But they will evolve, and I expect that Marilyn and I will count many of you as friends in the future. That is the power of relationship, the power of God working in our relationship, the power of time to transfigure us. I don't know that all of us would be here today if it were to simply say good bye. More likely, many of us gather to celebrate the past, the present and the future we share, even if we don't know what the future will look like.

In our walk together, we have cast our net into the world. In your new walk, trust that you can cast the net even deeper.

In our walk together, we opened doors to all people. In your future walk, fling open the doors ever wider.

In our walk together, you have demonstrated what it is to forgive and be forgiven. As you walk together in the future, remember the unforgiven hurt can become infected and never heal properly. Never miss the chance to forgive and be forgiven.

God is working within us, and we are works in progress. Our walk together has invited God to transfigure us, both individually and collectively. I know whatever I have become, whatever I am becoming, is in large part due the relationships I have known among you. May God finish the work he has begun in you and me that we might become the children of His dreams. In short, may we...

Be the people God created us to be,

Be the people Jesus gave his life for.

Be the people who walk in love.

Be the people changed by love,

Be the people who, through love, change the
world.

Be the people who never tire of hearing about
the power of relationship.