

Today's Gospel text, which Chuck just read for us tells us the story of the transfiguration, meaning change. Jesus takes 3 disciples up a mountain, and an event happens, causing change... Jesus' identity is clearly revealed to them. He is the messiah. What was changed was their understanding. You would think this would've been obvious to them, that he is the Christ through the miracles he had performed and the ways Jesus lived his life... Let us not forget though, that we have the advantage of knowing what is about to happen. We know how this all ends... betrayal, unfair trial, pain, bloodshed, mocking, wailing, sour wine, forgiveness and death... but then... then something new. We know about the resurrection and the ascension that follows. They don't. They're living it. So, let's go back... Six days earlier, Jesus told them what was coming. He would suffer and die and Peter, like many of us would, says, "No! There must be another way! This cannot be!" To which Jesus replies, "Get behind me Satan! Set your mind on divine things." In modern terms, it means, "Do not argue with me! See the bigger picture of God's presence in this!" Peter was struggling. He was going to lose his dearest friend. Jesus was really asking, "Are you ready?", And Peter, in his way, says, "No! Not for that!" But what could truly ready them for the gruesome events ahead? What could ready any of us? They were scared of the events to come, the divine implications, the political implications... This ending didn't seem right. And even in knowing it, there were so many unknowns. None of it seemed right or real. In our text today, Jesus reassures them. "Do not be afraid." Those words are written 365 times in the Bible. 365 days we wake and face a future unknown and 365 times God tells us, "Do not be afraid." A year and a half ago I went to Maui for the first time and my sister, my mom, and I took a hike to a cove where people would jump off this really high rock. It's called cliff diving, though this was more of a baby cliff. It was about 15 feet up from the water. My mom wanted to film us taking a leap off the rock. My sister, younger, more outgoing, and always braver, she goes first. She climbs over the other boulders to get up to the one that overlooks the ocean below, looks back, waves, and with a big smile takes the jump. Then my mom says, "Go, Emily!" I was not excited about this. I am scared of heights. I've always been more cautious and timid. But... I'm in Hawaii! And... my little sister just did it, so... I can't exactly not. I guess this answers the question... if everyone else jumped off a cliff would you? Yep. So, I clamber my way over on all fours... not the picture of grace. I crawl onto the boulder like a crab of some sort and timidly peer over the edge as I cling to this rock with every toe and finger. It felt like I was 50 feet up. The deep blue waters were crashing up against the rocks, sea foam spraying high into the air. I looked over to where you climb out after the jump. There was a trail of blood going up the rocks. This didn't look promising. My stomach flipped. A line was beginning to form behind me of people who had done it over and over again. Suddenly I was transported back to when I was child. I looked back at my mom, she was still filming. But I wasn't going to go down in Béghin history as a coward. Not this time... No, adult Emily was going to be the brave, independent, adventurous woman her younger self always idolized. So, I psyched myself out... because my mind literally was not letting my body do this... so I closed my eyes, and stepped out to embrace the fall... the footage reveals that I was actually still on all fours, and did something more like a toad jump... if the toad were old and sickly. My mom said it all happened so fast. I remember that moment in the air between the rock and the water. I had lost all control of what was about to happen and for a moment I was alive. Perhaps that's what they were all chasing, the ones who kept getting in line again and again. I hit the water and went several feet down before swimming my way back up to make it over to the bloodied rocks. Once was enough for me, but I did it. Was I ready? No, but I understood it so I closed my eyes and forced myself to do something new, scary, and unexpected. So I endured it and was surprised. I think many things in life are like this. The future comes to us one second at a time and we prepare for it as best we can, but sometimes we just endure it as it hits us. I wish those moments could all be choices like my little cliff hop was, but the reality is that rarely do we get the choice. Are we ever ready for tragedy, pain, heartbreak, or loss? Are we ever ready to face the darkness of life when it steals the light from our eyes and the energy from our hearts? How could we be? I wrote this sermon as I was packing and coordinating my move. I put all my dearest treasures in my suitcase... I placed Bandit's ashes in there on Thursday. I came here with him. He was my best friend, my companion, the dog of my heart. On March 3rd, 2021 I knew it was his time. It was awful, despite the months of anticipatory grief... I was not ready, but he was. I called Ted to help me and we drove to the vet and I remember the vet asking me how many minutes I wanted before she would give the injection. I looked at her and asked, "How could you ask me this?" To ask, how many minutes I want with my heart before it's gone. If I could, I would have suspended time and stayed with him forever, but 10 minutes it was. I had been saying goodbye to Bandit for months, but here, as I hugged him close and he slipped away, it is 2023 and I am still not ready though it has already happened. How could we be ready? Yet sometimes, we must endure. A few months ago I saw a series of pictures in the news of high school girls in Ukraine posing in front of their schools, which now were only piles of rocks on the ground. They were in their prom dresses. They looked beautiful, their hair was done up and their dresses sparkled and dazzled, but behind

them was their world and it was in ruin. I'm sure their classmates didn't all make it to this moment either. This was not the prom they had envisioned, but it was the one they made in the circumstance they had. I see images from Turkey of people and animals being pulled from the rubble of the earthquakes. Over 46,000 are dead. I saw the tapes of buildings falling down like they were made of twigs. The first tapes I saw, I kept searching to see if this was CGI or a movie or video game because it didn't look real. People were running in all directions and the camera showed views in 360. Every building collapsed in seconds. The blue sky turned gray with debris. No one knew where to run to. In seconds their world came crashing. Are you ready? Are you ready for what was always there to be gone? Even when we know it's coming... Is readiness even important? What will come will come and with each second we march closer to it and it to us. Jesus tells them he will die. Even Jesus was not ready. On the night before he died he prayed among the olive trees in the garden, Lord, please, another way... but if this be your will, so be it. Though this was happening to Jesus, he consoles his friends. He touches them. Get up, and do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. The opposite of fear is not courage, for the two exist together... but fear is combatted by hope. Hope is what the girls in Ukraine had. We focus on the rubble, but yet they wear sparkling dresses and find a way to know joy. Hope is what the rescuers have in Turkey with each stone they remove and each being they recover alive. Hope is what Jesus delivers on the mountaintop when it is revealed beyond a doubt that Jesus is the Christ and the Christ will come again after death. Hope is what sustains us through life... readiness and understanding are luxuries, but hope is a necessity. Hope that Christ will come again... but what if I told you that Christ is among us already? Today there is a moth on the cover of your bulletin with 3 people watching it. This was another image I generated with an artificial intelligence bot. I typed in "transfiguration." You would have thought that we'd see a butterfly, after all that is the symbol for Christ and what is traditionally associated with transfiguration or metamorphosis... but it gave me a moth. It made me remember a funny moment in 2020 after we had gone fully online. Ted and I were preaching the windows and as we were discussing them in the empty sanctuary, we looked upon the Easter window. There above Jesus you see, what... I said butterflies! Ted said, "No! They're moths!" I argued back and he said something funny, but I couldn't recall what it was, so yesterday I called him up to see if he remembered that moment. He said, "Well, their wing to body ratio! They're moths!" Then we hung up and 30 seconds later my phone rings. "No! It's because of the light! They like the light! They're moths!" Ted and I still differ on this, but I thought, you know... if Jesus were what we expected all the time, then that wouldn't be Jesus at all. He came to us born of a virgin into a small, vulnerable, fleshy body, from a place called Nazareth where nothing good can come from. Before he could speak he made kings tremble in fear. He taught us that faith can move mountains and yet be the size of only a mustard seed. That the last shall be first and the first shall be last. That the lowly and the meek and the poor are blessed and that all people are children of God. He turned law on its head and stood up for the women and the children and the leper and the lame. This was not the grand, shining messiah the scribes and pharisees had imagined and hoped for and if we met him today, I wonder how many of us would recognize him by our hopes. If Jesus stood before us and told us he was a moth, how many of us would say, no, the messiah is a butterfly. The future is unknown and holding on to what we think it should look like, might blind us to the hope and beauty to be found in what it is when it comes. Expectations can ruin the best of something and cause us to ignore the holy in the ordinary. I know this is my last day with you all, so with hope to help me set aside some fears, I hope you will all hear what I have to say to you now. On Wednesday we begin the Lenten season and we are called to turn our faces to the East, towards Jerusalem, where Jesus will be tried, persecuted, beaten, and crucified... and then rise. Lent is the wilderness time it is the time of change... It is a time to be endured and yet embraced. FPC Bryan has seen a lot of change in times of uncertainty in years past and this church family embraced the hope of God and worked together to thrive in new ways. You recognized the holy in the ordinary because you were awake and alive to it. It was scary, but with hope in the face of the unknown, you found your way and you will do it again. These past 3 and half years I have truly been transformed by you and will carry you in my skills and practices as I minister to others in the future. In my time here we have endured covid, loss, heartbreak, and also... joy, laughter, goodness, kindness, and hope. Christ is in you, with you, and waiting for you in the places you will go. It may be a little scary sometimes, but God will hold you when you tremble and your light will shine in the darkness as long as you hold it up. Do not be afraid. The future is coming one second at a time and whatever comes, may the grace and peace of God find you there in the ordinary and extraordinary places of the holy. As for me, I will remember you in my heart. And know that I was never ready to leave you, but in me lives hope for you, for me, for all of us that the love of God prevail through us wherever we may be. Thank you, First Presbyterian of Bryan. Go with God and shine with hope. Amen.