



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Last Sunday after Epiphany – March 3, 2019: The Anniversary of Parkland

When I think about the Transfiguration, I often think about its feast day on August 6 – the same date as the anniversary of the atomic bomb that we dropped on Hiroshima, Japan in 1945.

In many a sermon, including ones from this pulpit, I've talked about how the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was a moment of transfiguration for the world. The world was never the same after that and it was propelled into a different way of being.

But there have been many other moments of transfiguration in our world since August 6, 1945, many ways that we've been propelled into different ways of being. And the one that comes to mind for me had an anniversary on February 14, and this is the first time that I've been back with you that I can actually talk about it – I'm talking about the loss of 17 lives at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018—a bloody Valentine's Day massacre.

That was a moment that changed us forever – it was a moment of transfiguration not only for our country, but also for the world – seeing the violence of those lives lost and then watching those young high school students take a stand, effect change, and organize a march were 800,000 people descended upon the nation's capital to say that we could no longer live in a world where someone could go in and shoot up young people in our schools. As you know, I was one of those 800,000 demonstrators.

The thing is, with the cycle of the news that we have these days and the information with which we were bombarded and inundated on a regular basis, we tend to forget. The shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is now just one of many events that we have to process in our brains—church shootings, white supremacy marches, families being separated at our borders; but that doesn't mean that they're not moments of transfiguration, and perhaps we've come to understand that transfiguration starts and plays itself out on smaller scales that expand outward and into large circles of influence and concern.

And I guess I'm thinking about all of this because I was channel surfing in the other day and came upon an HBO special called *Song of Parkland*. Filmed in the months following the shooting, while the Florida school community is grappling with the tragedy, *Song of Parkland* documents the dedication of teacher Melody Herzfeld and her theater students as they return to school and resolve to continue with their production that they'd been rehearsing prior to the shooting.

The film starts with footage from the actual day of the shooting, including footage of the SWAT team going in to rescue a group of children from their classroom.

Ms. Herzfeld tells her students: "They're going to come and get us in a minute and I want you to do exactly what they say. And don't cry. Then the SWAT team comes in and everybody has to put down their cell phones and walk out with their hands up and when they get to safety, Ms. Herzfeld says, "Okay. Now you can cry." And the students let it all go.

"Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God." . . . - Queen Emma.

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From that snippet, the film goes on to show how the students firm their resolve go on with and perform a play they'd been rehearsing and then the film ends with them at the Tony Awards on Broadway in New York City where they'd been invited to sing a song from the musical "Rent" in a way that shows that nothing, most especially fear, that nothing could prevent them from living into their dreams and what they felt called to do.

And I think that this shows us that tragedy can be transfigured into goodness and that the human spirit is persistent and bold in that pursuit. Tragedy didn't win out for Ms. Herzfeld and her students. They transfigured tragedy into hope and goodness prevailed—and then there they were performing on stage at the Tony Awards on Broadway in New York City.

It's now been a little over a year since the shooting in Parkland and almost a year since you all gave me your blessing to go to on that march in Washington DC.

And so, I guess I want our moment of transfiguration to be that we don't forget this tragedy. That we remember it and keep the forces of it alive if what we're called to be is agents of peace for the Gospel. For Fr. Keleawe and me: we had the grace to sit at General Convention and listen to the family of Carmen Schentrup stand with their bishop on the platform and listen to how their lives have been changed since they lost their daughter and sister in Parkland, their daughter and sister who was a devoted and dedicated Episcopal Church youth.

And I'm proud of the way the Episcopal Church takes stands on social justice issues like Parkland: interring the ashes of Matthew Shepard in the National Cathedral on the 20th anniversary of his death, taking us deputies out to the Hutto Detention Center during General Convention and saying prayers for those inside who had been separated from their children as the Presiding Bishop said: Make America great again by making America kind, by making America just, by making a America good; and then by making time for the parents of Carmen Schentrup to proclaim that our laws didn't help to prevent the death of their daughter at the young and tender age of 16 but that we didn't have to resign ourselves to that. In other words, it's time to change. It's time to be transfigured.

And so now we have to ask: What are our personal and individual moments of transfiguration?

I'd like to share the words of Desmond Tutu who says this: The most unlikely person, the most improbable situation—these are all transfigurable—they can be turned into their glorious opposites; Indeed, God is transforming the world now—through us—because God loves us.

Desmond Tutu continues: There very well may be times when God has regretted creating us, but I am convinced that there are many more times that God feels vindicated by our kindness, our magnanimity, our nobility of spirit.

Those kids from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School definitely lived into those words.

And they did it in a world of mass shootings, race riots, and refugees seeking asylum from violence only to find a different kind of violence on their horizons of hope for peace.

And as the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School sing on that Broadway stage, they show us that maybe we're looking for a very complicated answer that's actually very simple. Maybe the answer is right here, right here at this table where we nourish ourselves with Christ's body and blood, which moves us to prayer – prayer that pays attention to God as a part of our lives,

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prayer which moves us to listen to God and act as God's agents of mission, God's mission of love in this world where people go in and shoot up schools, where white supremacists march in our streets, where young children are separated from their parents at our borders, and where atomic bombs are dropped on God's people in the midst of war.

And as they sing they help us to remember that while the Holy Possible hangs before us, the Holy Possible also rises from the grave of tragedy, and that the Holy Possible is transfigured before Peter's eyes, before John's eyes, before James' eyes, before our eyes, and that the Holy Possible promises us transfiguration to us in our lives.

And that gives us the wherewithal that we need to live lives of love. That's how we transfigure. That's how we transcend. That's how we transform. Transfigure, transcend and transform ourselves and transfigure, transcend and transform the world.

And as we mark the one year anniversary of the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, it's all summed up in the lyrics of the song that those kids' song on that stage. This is what they sing:

Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes.
How do you measure, measure a year?

In daylights?
In sunsets?
In midnights?
In cups of coffee?
In inches?
In miles?
In laughter?
In strife?

In five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes, how do you measure a year in the life?

And then they sing the answer:

How about love?
Measure in love.
Seasons of love.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us work together to hitch on to that star of hope given to us in those beautiful voices on the stage and transfigure the world.

Measure in love.
Seasons of love.

May the seventeen souls that died on that day rest in peace and rise to eternal life in Christ.

Amen.