

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

YOU ARE BELOVED

By Pr. Beate Chun

Ashes and Radiance — A Childhood Question

Grace to you and peace
from the one who is
and who was
and who is to come.

I grew up in Germany in a four-generation household,
and it was a gift beyond measure.

My grandmother and my great-grandfather
lived in the apartment upstairs,
and I spent countless hours with them —
especially with my great-grandfather,
who always seemed to have time.

Time to sit.

Time to listen.

Time to read.

One of my favorite things was
having him read fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm.
And the story I loved most was Cinderella —
in German, *Aschenputtel*.

It is almost fitting that their name is “Grimm,”
because their stories are darker
than the softened versions created by
The Walt Disney Company.

The older versions are raw.
They do not avoid hardship.

In the Grimm version,
Cinderella's life is harsh.
Her stepmother and stepsisters
force her into heavy labor.
She sleeps beside the hearth, in the ashes.
She is always dirty and exhausted.
She is treated not as a daughter but as a servant.

And yet — she has a hazel tree.
In that tree lives a mysterious bird
who grants her gifts:
beautiful dresses, delicate shoes.
With these gifts she is transformed.
She becomes radiant,
dignified, luminous.
She goes to the ball. She dances. She shines.

But the next morning, she is back in the ashes.

And in the Grimm story,
this does not happen just once.
The ball lasts three nights.
Three times she is transformed.
Three times she dances.
Three times she must slip away,
return home, and lie down again by the hearth.

By morning, there is no trace
of the dazzling young woman.
Only the ash-covered girl remains.

As a child, that puzzled me.
Which one was the real Cinderella?
The girl in the ashes — overlooked, worn down?
Or the radiant girl at the ball?
Which one revealed her true self?

And why did she have to move back and forth
between those two worlds?

Was she truly a princess hidden under ashes?
Or was she truly the ash girl
who occasionally managed to hide her poverty
beneath some shining clothes?

On the Mountain — Glory Revealed

That question came back to me this week
as I pondered the story of the Transfiguration.

For nearly three years,
Jesus had been traveling through Galilee.
He preached and healed.
He told parables.
He touched the sick. He cast out demons.
By all appearances,
he lived a humble, ordinary life.

Sometimes he taught in synagogues,
but often he taught in fields, on hillsides,
even from a boat pushed slightly offshore.

At one point he said,
“Foxes have holes
and birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

He depended on the hospitality of others —
including a group of women
who supported his ministry financially.
I imagine simple clothes.
Simple meals.
Dusty roads.

And then one day,
he took Peter, James, and John
up a high mountain.

And there he was changed before their eyes.

His face shone like the sun.
His clothes became dazzling white.
And suddenly Moses and Elijah were there,
speaking with him.

Why Moses and Elijah?

In Jewish tradition, Moses represents the Law:
it was Moses who climbed Mount Sinai
and received the commandments.
Elijah represents the Prophets —
and the hope that Elijah
would return before the Messiah.

The Law and the Prophets together
encompass Israel's sacred story.
Their presence signaled
that something immense was happening.

And then a voice from heaven declared,
"This is my beloved Son,
with whom I am well pleased.
Listen to him."

And then it was over.
The light disappeared.
The mountain was just a mountain again.
Jesus looked as he always had.
And he told the disciples
not to tell anyone what they had seen.

Like Cinderella returning to the ashes.

One moment dazzling glory.
The next moment, dusty roads.
One moment divine radiance.
The next moment, ordinary humanity.

The Mystery of Who He Is — and Who We Are

Perhaps the disciples were as puzzled
as I had been as a child.

Who is he really?
Is he an ordinary man with secret divine power?
Or is he a divine being only appearing to be human?

Believers through the centuries
have wrestled and argued
and at times bitterly fought
over explanations and interpretations and doctrines.

In the end, the nature of Jesus
will always remain mystery —
a holy mystery.

But it is a mystery that points to
our own mystery as well.

Who are we?
What does it mean to be human?

We are flawed creatures
and yet capable of great achievements.
We are capable of deep compassion —
and of sharp cruelty.
We can be generous one moment
and selfish the next.
We speak words that heal —
and words that hurt.
We long for justice —
and sometimes choose comfort instead.

We are brave in one situation
and fearful in another.

We are, as Martin Luther would say,
at the same time saint and sinner.

Ashes and radiance.
Dust and glory.

You Are Beloved

The Transfiguration
did not erase Jesus' humanity.

Jesus continued to be fully human.
Not long after the glory on the mountaintop
he was nailed to a cross
where he suffered and cried
and felt pain like all humans feel.

For us, it is the other way around.

Our humanity, our flaws,
our failures, our brokenness
do not erase our true self
and our belovedness.

The words spoken over Jesus
echo over us as well:

You are my beloved child.

That identity does not disappear
when we stumble or fall.
It does not vanish when we fail,
when we doubt, when we fall short.

We may feel like ash-covered versions of ourselves —
tired, flawed, burdened.

But that is not the whole truth.

Today's story invites us to see more deeply.
To look at ourselves and at each other
not with eyes that see only the ashes
and the flaws,
but with the eyes of God —
that see beauty
and belovedness.

Amen.

**Sermon for Sunday, February 15, 2026
The Transfiguration of our Lord Year A**

Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco

Text: [Matthew 17:1-9 NRSVue - The Transfiguration - Six days later. - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Lent | Transfiguration | Belovedness