

Perfection is impossible. Transformation isn't

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“And they lived happily ever after.” That is the familiar closing line of fairytale stories we heard growing up. Hearing those stories, we felt that if we just got our prince charming, or we just were able to slay the dragon, or we received that magic kiss we could break the spell of bad things and life would be magically restored to the fairytale life we dreamed about. Now, having grown up and have lived many through some big and small tragedies of life, we may have come to understand that life is not a fairytale. And yet society still seems to demand that we obtain that fairytale dream. We need to have the perfect family and the perfect job and even if life does get us down, we feel compelled to put on a smile and crisp clean set of clothes and appear to be in control. It can be oh so tiring. That worldly pressure can even come from well-intentioned faithful people who believe that if we admit our struggles that we are less than holy, or we have failed in our faith somehow. So, we may feel the best thing to do is fake it till we make it. That somehow we can become better Christians by acting like we have it all together.

Sometimes though those attempts to power through the tough spots of life, become a shield we lose ourselves behind. We forget how to let our guard down and be real in front of others. We slowly realize we are living a lie and

may even feel empty inside. Even our faith can become just another demand on us to appear better than we really are instead of a source of sanctuary from the storms of life.

Jesus saw the harm such fake attempts at being holy had on people. His words in today's reading may even sting a bit hearing the word hypocrite. We know this word to mean one who puts on a false appearance of virtue or one who intentionally acts falsely or misleading to appear as something they are not. The original Greek word used here is *hoopocrates*, yes the same word as today - hypocrite. Back in the time of Jesus meant simply to be an actor, one who interpreted the character they were performing. I think Jesus saw it more as someone who was putting on a show for others trying to impress others.

Jesus, in this reading, is really encouraging us not to put on a show. Not to act in a way, trying to convince others that we are someone or something we are not. Jesus knew that true faith does not come through grand gestures of piety, but rather by a genuine heart that seeks ways to commune with the divine. Don't worry about how others see you, only pay attention to deepening your own relationship with God.

Jesus was not saying we should avoid fasting, praying or other religious practices, but to be sure we are doing it for the right reasons and not to impress others. Genuine faith starts with deep honesty. Honesty about what's bothering us, honesty about our doubts and failings, our regrets in life. Those are the hallmarks of confession. Confession is a very vulnerable

act, and it starts before God. The church offers many planned opportunities to take an honest look within, to confess before God and to receive forgiveness. Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent offers us time to let down our masks and look deep within. To take time to focus our hearts and nurture our faith in Christ.

Tonight, we remember the brevity of life. We remember from dust we came and to dust we shall return. We stand before God knowing we are not perfect, God never asked us to be perfect, but to be transformed. To grow in faith, hope and most of all Love.

Our Lent series, "Good Enough," is based on a book of devotions by the same name by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Kate Bowler is a seminary professor whose research about the history of the prosperity gospel and self-help movements in the US laid the groundwork for her latest NY Times bestselling books about dealing with the pressure to "live your best life now" when life throws you curveballs that make constant upward achievement very difficult... like the cancer she has dealt with over the last few years. In the Good Enough book of devotions, she and Jessica Richie offer wonderfully graceful invitations to seek alternatives to the pressure of perfectionism. We hope that you will make reading these daily devotions part of your Lent practice and join one of our Sunday Morning Bible Study and debrief and deepen your experience through conversation with others.

As Kate and Jessica say in their book, “a fast is giving up something—anything—to make more room for God. It might be a break from social media or Netflix, caffeine, unkind words, alcohol, or holding a grudge. If you are someone who has a complicated relationship with restricting food, skip that for now. Try something else instead. Remember, this isn’t about punishing yourself or a thinly veiled version of a diet. Share your intention with a friend to reinforce your commitment, but do your fast in secret—just between you and God. Try it out for a week, and then reassess.”

Try a new spiritual practice or plan to simply sit in silence with an open heart to hear for a few minutes each day. Make room for God to be present to you each day. It doesn’t need to be perfect just good enough. Good enough to know God loves you. Good enough to let go of the temptation to be perfect. Good enough to be yourself – a beloved child of God.