“This is something that will be with me for the rest of my life.” That’s what Jim Boehoim said last Saturday. Jim Boehoim was referring to the accident that killed Jorge Jiminez 11 days ago.

It was late on a Wednesday night. Jorge was riding with three of his friends in a car. The road was icy. The car slid on the slippery road, hit the guardrail and ended up sideways in the left two lanes of the highway. Jorge helped one of his friends off the road and onto the other side of the guardrail. Moments later Jorge was hit by Jim Boehoim’s car as Jim tried to avoid the car that blocked the highway. Jorge was dead within seconds.

“This is something that will be with me for the rest of my life.” That’s what Jim Boehoim said. “It’s not going to be better next week. It’s not going to be better next month. It’s not going to be better next year.”

Jim Boehoim has lived in Syracuse and been part of our community for 53 out of the past 56 years. Chances are you know much more about him than I do. But there is one thing I know about Jim Boehoim. He was changed forever by what happened to him eleven days ago. His life will never be the same. There are some parts of his life that will be much more difficult. There are also abilities in him that might become a new kind of strength, there are values that might move into the center of his life.

Jim is one of the best basketball coaches in the history of the game. I get the impression that he is also a good person and that he cares for his players and his colleagues. Now new strengths might be revealed in these interactions. Perhaps it will be a stronger ability to express compassion. Perhaps it will be a new perspective on the joys and sorrows of life. Perhaps it will be in a new urgency to express gratitude or appreciation. Perhaps God’s love and mercy will be revealed in some new way in Jim’s life. Jim was changed by what happened to him. Some of the change will be difficult. Some of the change will be good.

That is the way transformation happens. We are changed by what we experience in life. Sometimes the change is something we have been seeking for years. Sometimes the change is something no one would ever want. But if the change is really a transformation, if we are really changed by what has happened, the change will be forever and some of the change will be difficult and some of the change will be good.

I want to suggest that there is not that much difference between the transformation in Jim Boehoim’s life and the transformation Jesus experienced in today’s Gospel passage. In one or two crucial ways, Jesus’ life was different from our lives. But in most ways Jesus lived as we lived, Jesus suffered as we suffer, Jesus was changed as we are changed. Let’s learn about the way we are transformed in our lives by hearing the story again. 

*Jesus took Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.* As we work through the enormous changes in our lives we might follow Jesus’ example and be intentional about making space in our lives for prayer. We also might notice that the enormous changes in life usually do not happen in times of complete solitude. For some of us it would be so much easier if we could go off on our own, figure out the new reality and be in a state of perfect balance and understanding as we return to daily life with our friends or family or coworkers. Life didn’t work out that way for Jesus and it doesn’t work out that way for us. We have to figure out the enormous changes together.

*While Jesus was praying the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly the disciples saw two men, Moses and Elijah talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. This is the big, dramatic event. The question is, “Did Jesus know this was going to happen, or was this completely unexpected?” Jesus was intentional about praying, but he does not seem to be omniscient, he does not*
seem to be completely in charge of all of the events in this story. In our lives we often wish we could see the big changes coming. We wish we were more prepared for the changes that happen. Sometimes we even blame ourselves for not anticipating the enormous changes of life. Blaming ourselves doesn’t help. If it is true that Jesus did not know everything that would happen in his life perhaps we can accept that we will not be able to see everything that is coming in our lives.

In the next verses we observe the responses of Jesus’ disciples to the transfiguration: Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what he was saying. Jesus’ friends didn’t know what to make of the surprising events on the mountain. This will probably be true for us as well. As the enormous changes are happening in our lives we will be glad to be surrounded by friends or family members. But we cannot expect others to understand everything that is happening to us.

Let’s also pay attention to the context for the transfiguration. According to Luke this story happens eight days after Jesus had taken a bit of a retreat with the twelve disciples to have quiet time for prayer and teaching. The main topic of their conversation was about the nature of discipleship and what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah, to be a person anointed by God. Just a few verses before our Gospel passage Jesus surprises his disciples by saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day raised.” The Jesus said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross every day and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”

This is the context for the transfiguration; Jesus and his disciples are beginning to understand that the expectations we have created about life are false. The truth is God’s way of love is a journey of joy and suffering, fellowship and rejection, life and death.

Finally, we should pay attention to the fact that the transfiguration is one of three or four significant transformations we see in the life of Jesus. The transformation described in today’s Gospel passage is dramatic, but so was his baptism and the forty days he spent alone in the wilderness. Jesus’ ascension was a moment of transformation. Jesus death and resurrection changed everything, not only for him, but for us.

So the Jesus way is a life of transformation and transfiguration. We are going to go through times of dramatic change in our lives. The question is, how will we respond to these changes?

Most people, me included, often seem to hold to a personal religion that is partly about stability and preservation of the status quo. We attach ourselves to our jobs or our homes or to a group of people for stability. This makes a lot of sense because stability often brings personal and physical safety and security, and we need personal and physical safety and security.

But we also need to be changed. We need to change because life changes. We need to change because the only things that do not change are things that are not alive. We need to change because love requires us to change.

Jesus showed us the way of love is a way of change. God calls us to become different than we used to be. Again and again, God encourages us to be changed, to be transformed in order to love.

This is never easy. Change always takes courage and energy. But we are not alone. This is the reason we are together, to make our way along a journey of expected and completely unexpected changes together. This is why we are here, to give each other support as we allow ourselves to change in order to love, and sometimes in order to love more. This is why we are here, to walk alongside our brother Jesus, who went through changes far greater than ours, all for the sake of love.