1

Children

What do you think your parents would say if Go asked them to sacrifice you?

God forbid.

Abraham was not stupid or blind in his faith in God. He may not have known what God was up to but he knew that God promised him many descendants and this was his only Son

Isaac was carrying the wood for the fire and noticed there was no animal to be sacrificed what was he thinking. The Jewish rabbis write that in the tradition of the Maccabbees he was going to be sacrificed for the nation.

They both showed they had trust in a God they didn’t always understand. Just like you when your parents ask you to do something you don’t understand (like your homework) you trust that your parents want what’s best for you so you go ahead and do it without understanding.

God used this event to teach that human sacrifice is forbidden so you don’t have to worry about God asking your parents to sacrifice you.

Adult

Perhaps you’ve heard the old story that sharks only grow as large as their surroundings permit. I’ve heard that for years but it turns out that is a misunderstanding. As a species sharks are very adaptive. There are over 500 different species and that gives the impression that they are individually adapting to their surroundings. If you have a small aquarium in your city, don’t place a baby Whale Shark in there. He won’t adapt to his environment. He grows to 60 feet in length. But you can place a Dwarf Lantern Shark in your home aquarium. Fully grown, he’s 8 inches long. (1)

I've noticed the same phenomenon with regard to followers of Jesus Christ. As a species we are highly adaptive. If we are challenged to live heroic lives for Christ, we have that capability. Left unchallenged, however, most of us stay where we are with an immature understanding of faith and a nominal commitment to Christ. Some of us need the ocean. Some of us need the home aquarium.

Our lesson contains one of those growing, stretching experiences that occurred for Jesus' disciples. Go with me to the top of a mountain. Jesus is there as are his three most trusted disciples: Peter, James and John. As usual Mark doesn't give us details about what happened on the mountain. Did they have a time of prayer? Did Jesus lead them in a time of meditation? We don't know. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT SUDDENLY THE DISCIPLES SAW JESUS TRANSFIGURED.

What does that mean, transfigured? It means he was changed, before their eyes. If you can imagine seeing the word “glory” occur, right in front of you, you’ll begin to get a picture of Jesus’ transfiguration. Jesus transformed into the glorified Christ who will one day reign over all of life. Add that to your mental picture. When you look at Transfiguration you are looking at the glory of God, but add to that, the Future. The disciples we’re looking into the future, our future. That's about as best as I can define it for you.  Right before the disciples' eyes Jesus was elevated to a new plateau.

Those of you who are baseball fans may remember a player by the name of Brooks Robinson, former third baseman of the Baltimore Orioles. Robinson was such a stellar defensive player that he became the standard of excellence for third basemen. It was often said of Brooks that he played third base as if he "came down from a higher league." (2)

It's a crude analogy, but the disciples saw Jesus as if he had come down from a higher league. Mark tells us that Christ's clothes became a dazzling white, whiter, says Mark, than any bleach on earth could get them. Then, says Mark, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Moses, of course, gave the children of Israel the Law. Elijah, on the other hand, was the greatest of the prophets. So, here were the highest representatives of the Law and the Prophets, and the transfigured Jesus was in their company. And the disciples heard a voice: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And the disciples were terrified.

I

A crucial statement, that: THE DISCIPLES WERE TERRIFIED. We can appreciate their response to this most unusual situation. We would have been terrified, too. We hear about people experiencing strange phenomena, near death experiences, out-of-body experiences, etc., but for the most part these sorts of things haven't happened to us. And we are a little suspicious when they happen to other people.

And we would be suspicious of Peter, James and John's report, except for the way in which it affected their lives. This experience, as well as many other experiences they had with Jesus, transformed them radically. You and I, 2,000 years removed can make light of their experience, but it was so very real to them that they gave their lives for Christ, literally! Christ was transfigured, and the disciples were terrified. Why were they terrified? Because they were dealing with something outside their experience. Here was Christ in all his glory. The future of mankind being unveiled for them. Here was someone coming down from a different league. Here was someone whose life shone with a beauty and an integrity they did not have. Here was one whose dazzling white robe indicated his holiness, his purity, his uniqueness, and they were but ordinary mortals. And they were afraid.

Being in Christ's presence made them aware of their inadequacy, their imperfection. They were sinners in the presence of one who was sinless. No wonder they were terrified.

While serving aboard a gunboat in Vietnam, Dave Roever was holding a phosphorus grenade some six inches from his face when a sniper's bullet ignited the explosive. He describes the first time he saw his face after the explosion: "When I looked in that mirror, I saw a monster, not a human being . . . My soul seemed to shrivel up and collapse in on itself, to be sucked into a black hole of despair. I was left with an indescribable and terrifying emptiness. I was alone in the way the souls in hell must feel alone." Finally, he came back to the States to meet with his young bride, Brenda. Just before Brenda arrived, Roever watched the wife of another burn victim tell her husband that she wanted a divorce. Then Brenda walked in.

"Showing not the slightest tremor of horror or shock," Roever writes, "she bent down and kissed me on what was left of my face. Then she looked me in my good eye, smiled, and said, Welcome home, Davey! I love you.' To understand what that meant to me you have to know that's what she called me when we were most intimate; she would whisper “Davey,” over and over in my ear. In that moment, by using her term of endearment for me, she was saying, “You are my husband. You will always be my husband. You are still my man." (3)

To understand the grace of God poured out in Jesus Christ, we must first understand our inadequacy, our imperfection, our ugliness, as it were. But the transfigured Christ in all his loveliness, in all his holiness, in all his glory still loves us, the sinful ugly ones. There was no need for the disciples to be terrified, but they did not know that. All they could see was Christ's holiness and their own unworthiness. And they were terrified.

II

THEN THEY WERE TRANSFORMED. That is the second thing we need to see. They were transformed. Oh, not at once. Transformation rarely happens all at once. Don't let anyone mislead you. Few people are genuinely converted completely all in one night. The experience on the Mount of Transfiguration was but one stop on the disciples' pilgrimage to becoming apostles of Jesus Christ. They would share many other important experiences with Christ. All the time, though, something real and important was happening inside them. They were becoming more like the Master. They were becoming more committed to him and to one another. Their faith, which was not even as large as a mustard seed, was growing. They would stumble and lose hold of it from time to time, but they would always come back to it and it would blossom into a mighty faith that would shake the Roman empire. These men would move from being terrified to being terrific. Their faith would grow from being easily intimidated to being almost invincible. They were in the process of being transformed by the presence of the transfigured Christ.

And the same thing can happen to us. Like the disciples we can also be terrified in Christ's presence because we are imperfect, but we soon discover that in his presence we are not without value and we are not without hope. Because Christ loves us, change is possible. This is the heart of today's lesson: The proper response to the transfigured Christ is transformation. To see the transfigured Christ is to be aware not only of our inadequacies, our ugliness, but also our possibilities. As he is, so shall we one day be.

The drama, The Man Born to be King, reaches its climax at the Crucifixion scene. The three Marys enter and approach the Roman guards. Mary, the mother of Jesus, speaks to the captain requesting permission to minister to the needs of her son. He roughly pushes her away. Then one of the other women come forward and make the same request. But she adds some interesting words. She asks the captain to do this, "for old times' sake." The captain refuses her request as well. Then with a sweeping motion of her hand she loosens her golden hair so that it cascades down her back. "Marcellus," she asks, "have you ever seen hair like this?" And then she thrust out a foot and asks, "And have feet ever danced for you like these feet?"

An incredulous expression comes to the captain's face. In amazement he says, "Mary Magdalene, how you have changed!" Slowly, with dramatic emphasis, she turns her back was to the audience and facing Christ on the cross, slowly she says, "Yes, Marcellus, I have changed; he changed me!"

To see Christ as he really is is to experience personal transformation.

C. S. Lewis put it quite pointedly: "He (Jesus) never talked vague, idealistic gas. When he said, ‘Be perfect,’ He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder, in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad." (4)

III

I like that imagery. Before we experience Christ's transforming power we are unhatched eggs who can only fly if we become more than we are. To experience the transfigured Christ is first of all to be terrified, then it is to be transformed. AND FINALLY IT IS TO BE TURNED LOOSE, TO BE TURNED LOOSE TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED. Christ came preaching the Kingdom of God, the reign of God in every heart. And it is to his followers that he has given the commission for the teaching and the preaching of this kingdom. That's you and me. We are to be transformed and then we are to be transformers.

You know how the story of the Mount of Transfiguration ends. Peter wants to build three booths, one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elijah, and stay on that mountain. But it is not Christ's mission to stay on the mountain and be worshiped. His is a ministry of love to the people in the valley below. And that is our ministry as well.

I read recently that when American forces captured Okinawa in World War II, the typical island village was a filthy place. The inhabitants were ignorant and poverty-stricken. But there was a village called Shimmabuke which was different. Its streets and homes were spotlessly clean. Its citizens were friendly and polite. Why was this village so different from the others? Thirty years before, a missionary stopped at Shimmabuke on his way to Japan. He won two men to Christ, Shosei Kina and his brother Mojon, and gave them a Bible. Through them the entire village became Christian and village life was transformed. (5)

That is our ministry. When we have been transformed by the transfigured Christ we catch a vision of what the world could be if we all lived under his Lordship.

No longer would Peter, James and John be content to live in a tiny fishbowl. Christ had called them to bigger and better things. Now it was time for them to reach their full potential as his followers. And friends, it is time for us to escape the fishbowl as well. Suppose you and I had been there with Peter, James and John on the mountaintop when Jesus was transfigured. What would have happened to us? Wouldn't we have been terrified? Wouldn't we have been transformed? Wouldn't we have been turned loose to transform the world for whom Christ died? Friends, the transfigured Christ IS here. And he is saying to you, do not be terrified but be transformed. Reach your full potential in Christ this day.

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1. John C. Maxwell, DEVELOPING THE LEADERS AROUND YOU (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.).

2. Elliot Johnson and Al Schierbaum, OUR GREAT AND AWESOME SAVIOR (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 35.

3. Dennis and Barbara Rainey, MOMENTS TOGETHER FOR COUPLES (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1995).

4. "C. S. Lewis on Holiness," by Jerry L. Walls, GOOD NEWS, May/June 1995, p. 30.

5. Roy B. Zuck, DEVOTIONS FOR KINDRED SPIRITS (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), p. 271.

Children

What color am I wearing today? (Violet or Purple) We wear this in two church seasons, which are? (Advent and Lent) It is the color of preparation? What are we preparing for now? (Easter) and in Advent (Christmas). What two colors do we use in the Christmas season? (Red and Green). What color do we use in Church for most of the year? (Green). Green is the color of hope and as Christians we are hopeful people. We are praying for this COVID pandemic to be over, that is hope. What is the other Christmas color? (Red).

Red is the color of blood, of sacrifice. If you would cut your finger, even

just a little bit, what would come out of the cut? That’s right, blood. And what color is

blood? Yes, it’s red ... bright red. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of God’s Son,

Jesus. And Jesus came to this earth to live, and to die. Jesus died on the Cross to save

us from our sins. He sacrificed himself, gave his blood, that we might belong to God

forever. So with red, we remember to celebrate Christmas, and what it means for God

to love us enough that he would sacrifice, give up his own Son. So red is a good color of

Christmas. Do you know how to make purple? (Mix Red and Blue)

What was celebrated on Friday? (Stations of the Cross). This whole season is focused

on Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus tells us to pick up our crosses. This means in this

season that we should sacrifice for others. So when your sibling needs help, you help.

When your parents need help, you help. Got the idea?

2

The readings begin this Sunday with the familiar story of Abraham and the sacrifice or near sacrifice of Isaac. Did you know the same story is found in the Quran but the major difference is that it is not Isaac but Ishmael who is the father of the Arabs and Isaac is the Father of the Jews. They both have the same father Abraham, Arabs and Jews – talk about sibling rivilary.

We have heard this story many, many times and have always focused on Abraham and his unwavering faith. It is quite a mystery how God could ask Abraham to do such a thing, to sacrifice his son. Human sacrifice and child sacrifice were abhorrent to
God. This story is the foundation of why the Old Testament condemns this time and again. It is one of the reasons given for the Babylonian exile. If we stay at the fringe level of the story, it is quite difficult to understand how Abraham could be told to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But, if we go deeper, then we realize that the whole point of the story was the strength of Abraham’s faith. He would trust in God no matter what was asked of him. God made him a promise of many children and if God said to sacrifice his only son, God would still keep his promises.

Changing the focus from Abraham to His son, Isaac. In *Genesis,* it seems clear that when he went up that mountain carrying the branches for a sacrificial fire, Isaac did not know his father’s plans. As time went on, Jewish scholars saw Isaac as participating in God’s plan for mankind through his father, Abraham. By the time of the Lord, scholars taught the people that Isaac was martyr. He was willing to die if this is what it would take for the covenant God made with Abraham to take place. The teachers of Jesus’ time compared Isaac to the Jewish martyrs who died for their faith during the Maccabean revolt against the Syrians. *Second Maccabees* tells the story of the seven sons and the esteemed elder who would rather die than deny their faith and defile themselves. The scholars taught that like those martyrs, Isaac did not value his life over the completion of God’s plan. Later, Christians would see in Isaac’s carrying the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain a prophecy of Jesus carrying the cross up to
Golgotha.

It is in this light that we can relate the story of Abraham and Isaac with the Transfiguration, today’s Gospel. On that mountain of mystery, Jesus met with Moses and Elijah. Why Moses and Elijah? Moses was the lawgiver. During the Exodus he showed the Hebrews how they could serve God. He told them they were God’s chosen people. God had a plan for them, one by which He would deliver them out of slavery and to a the place He set aside for them. The most important part of the Jewish bible, the five books of the Torah were attributed to Moses. Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. He was the one who did not die but was swept into heaven. He would come again when the time was right for God to complete his plan for mankind. The time had come on the mountain of the Transfiguration.

Jesus was there on that mountain. He was ready and willing to sacrifice himself for His Father’s plan to become a reality. He would die for the good of all. His sacrifice would lead to the glory of the Kingdom of God. His life, obscure in the eyes of the world,

and His death, which the world would view as dishonorable, freed others, freed us, to live and die in grace.

What does all this mean to us? It means that as followers of Christ we also must offer ourselves up for the good of others. When Jesus said that we cannot be His followers unless we were ready to take up our crosses, He was not using symbolic imagery. He meant it. As Christians, we are called to sacrifice ourselves for others.

That means that we have to reject the world’s diabolical egocentricity. Egocentricity is putting ourselves first before all others, the “It’s all about number one, me.” That is the way of the world. It is diabolical because the devil is determined to fight God’s plan for us by using us against ourselves. The story of the Fall demonstrates this. The devil led Adam and Eve into ruin by getting them to put themselves before God. “Eat this and you will be gods.” Their sin is continually repeated as the forces of evil win battle after battle with every person who chooses selfishness over love.

Putting others first, being charitable, is therefore not just a good thing to do, it Is the necessary way of life for those who are called to eternal life. When parents put their children before themselves, they are not just being good parents, they are being great Christians. As St Augustine says we Christians don’t have children, we have Christians. When husbands and wives put their spouses before themselves, they are not just being good husbands and wives, they are being great Christians. When we make time to help that elderly neighbor, we are not just being a good neighbor, we are being a great Christian. When we go to that hospital even though it is so difficult to see someone we love suffering, we are not just doing a good thing, we are being great Christians. When we have compassion on those that society is attacking or marginalizing knowing that many of our so-called friends will look down on us for associating with these people, we are being great Christians. When we sacrifice our wants for the needs of others, we are not just doing a wonderful thing; we are making the presence of Christ real in the world. We are participating in God’s plan for mankind.

Something wonderful happens when we step out of ourselves and give ourselves to others. We receive more than we give. We have all realized that whenever we are truly charitable we feel a huge joy, a joy so real that we are convinced that what we did was insignificant to what we received. And we are correct. In those moments of joy we become one with the Lord. We are transfigured with Him. We become people completely different because we are happier, infinitely happier.

Just as the Transfiguration of the Lord was a touch of heaven and a foreshadowing of the glory to come, our own transfigurations are a touch of heaven and a tangible prediction of the eternal joy to come.

Lent is a time for us to take a close look at ourselves and consider what we have to do to conquer selfishness and sin in our own lives. The various exercises of Lent help us to dive deeper into our commitment to the Lord. Lent helps us to take those steps we need to be bound to God’s plan.

We pray today for the grace to be part of the plan, part of the sacrifice, and part of the Glory.

3

Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story about a ship that was in serious trouble in a storm. A passenger on that ship, defying orders, made his way to the pilot, who seeing the fear on the passenger's face gave him a smile of assurance. Relieved, the traveler returned to his cabin and said, "I have seen the face of the pilot. He smiled and all is well."
There are times in life when we need to see our pilot face-to-face. That's what happened in this mystical story that the Church calls the Transfiguration of Christ. Peter, James and John were there. Moses and Elijah showed up from the past. They have an experience that is mystical and out of this world. I want to call to your attention Verse 8 that says, "Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."
"Turn you eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face."
What would a glimpse of Christ himself mean to you today?
I. THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFT.
There is mystery in this story. It's an epiphany, a theophany, an experience of the glory of God, so much that the face of Jesus becomes radiant and his clothes are whiter than bleach could make them.
People pay big money for radiant faces these days. Face lifts are a thriving business. The only problem is that the soul has a way of seeping through. Maxwell Maltz is a plastic surgeon. He's in the business of lifting people's faces, but, Dr. Maltz says, "Even though I get marvelous results, patients are often not happy. I have come to realize that inner scars are much more difficult to remove than outer ones."
Could your soul use a lift today? Has depression, difficulty, duties and daily routines caused your soul to sag, your spirit to falter, your heart to sink? Christ came to lift us. Contemporary Christian artist, Tim Hughes, wrote a beautiful praise and worship song which goes:
"Light of the world you stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes; let me see.
Beauty that made the heart adore you,
Hope of life spent with you.
So, here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me."
Have you seen Jesus like that? Could your soul use a lift today?
Maybe the lift you need is affirmation. In Verse 7 we read, "Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" We have heard this phrase from heaven before; it is there at the baptism of Jesus you remember, but we have a tendency to forget. Now, when Jesus is preparing to travel the road to Jerusalem to the cross, the heavens open one more time and the voice comes to remind His only Son, "You are my beloved child, you belong to Me."

One of life's biggest challenges is to remember that we are the beloved children of God. There are so many voices trying to tell us something different.
I walked into Upper Chesapeake Hospital this week to make a visit and a gentleman standing at the information desk said, "You're a preacher, aren't you?" My collar wasn’t showing. "Well, yes," I replied. "How could you tell?" "Well, you walk like a preacher, talk like a preacher, look like a preacher; I just knew." Under my breath I prayed, "Lord, help me." Have so many years of doing this made me look this way? As Abraham Lincoln said everyman over 40 is responsible for his face. Thank goodness I don’t have a dog to look like.

We can easily become what we do, what others think, a lifetime accumulation of successes and failures. That's why we need to hear another voice, the voice of God reminding us that we are his beloved children. We don't need to waste a lot of time trying to prove what already is. We just need to lean on His everlasting arms and abide in His unfailing love. We need to realize that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. Remember who you are. Could your soul use a lift today?

iii

 THE EXALTED CHRIST GIVES US A LIFE.
Peter wanted to make a monument of this mystery. He wanted to build three shrines on the site so visitors for centuries would take note of what happened there, but Jesus will have none of it. In Verse 5, Peter says to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" and then in Verse 6 the Scriptures say, ("He did not know what to say for they were terrified.") Fearful that he could say nothing, Peter just proposes an idea-a building project on the mountain. Oh, Jesus, this has been such a wonderful time in our lives we ought to put a museum up here and pilgrims for centuries would come. I can see them now, by the tour bus loads, they will gather here. We could charge admission and make little replicas of the temples we are building and they would buy them and take them back home as pilgrims do from place to place. Let's just stay up here. It is wonderful. Then Verse 9 says, "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders to keep quiet and go to work." Life is not lived on the mountain top. It's hammered out in the valleys among the people where they hurt and struggle and try to make up their minds what they are going to do. As He led them down the mountain He reminded them not to make a shrine out of this-just keep it to yourselves.
Discipleship is a daily decision to follow. Back in Chapter 8:34- John Peterson translates it, (Message Bible) "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Follow me and I will show you how. Self help is no help at all." Stores are stocked with books on leadership. There is even a book entitled, Leadership for Dummies. If I attended one-tenth of the leadership seminars that come across my desk I would never be present to minister at the VA. We are a church and society obsessed with leadership.
Jesus had a different idea. He was interested in follower- ship. Before you lead, you must learn to follow. Able leaders emerge from the ranks of able followers. No wonder aggressive, self-starting, self-sufficient citizens of Baltimore/Perryville have difficulty becoming Christian disciples.
I believe it takes at least three things to be a follower.
A. TRUST

Jesus said to his disciples in John 14, "Trust in God. Trust also in me."
Trust is the glue that holds people together. When you trust a person, you have nothing to fear. You can relax, be safe, enjoy each other's company.
That's why it's troubling when people lose their trust in God. Where can they go?
B. TRUTH
Jesus asked his disciples, what's the word on the street? 'Who do people say I am?' 'They say John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet.' Then He personalizes the question. 'What about you?' 'Who do you say I am?' Peter has his finest hour. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
Followers are not sheep too dumb to have an opinion. Followers are not "yes people" who tell the leader only what he or she wants to hear. Followers speak the truth in love. C. TEACHABLE SPIRIT
John 16:13 says, "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things."
There are some things we did not learn in kindergarten. People who know it all may not be as smart as they think they are. Did you ever try to teach somebody something who already knows it all? Tough assignment.
The value of an open mind is its receptivity to different thoughts, further logic, finer discernment.
Disciples know how to follow. Get a life-follow Jesus. What happens is down there where the interactions of people are going on and opinions are being formed and decided. If anyone wants to follow me, get out of the driver's seat and let me lead, says Jesus.
Disciples have a heart to help. "Jesus is greeted by a crowd in the valley" (Verse 14). In that crowd is a man with an epileptic son. When the seizures strike, the kid foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, becomes stiff as a board. The disciples tried to help the boy, but they were powerless. So the father says to Jesus, "If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart to help us" (Verse 22). Jesus does. It seems to me that's what disciples do. They have a heart and help.
Roy Hattersley is a columnist for a London newspaper. He is also an outspoken atheist. But covering the Katrina devastation on our Gulf Coast, the reporter made this observation. "There was a notable absence of rationalists' societies, free-thinker clubs, and atheists' associations, among volunteer relief workers. There was a notable presence of the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and other faith-based groups digging through the rubbish trying to help." Then Roy Hattersley said this, "Christians are the most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others, while others sit around and scoff at religious intellectual absurdity." Did you know all but one the chaplains who have won the medal of honor are Catholic. They seemingly are more willing to sacrifice for others. It is a tough act to follow let me tell you. (Newport story) Maybe we Christians haven't done enough to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters who have lost everything, but at least we have done something. That's what discipleship does. It gives you a heart to help. If you can do anything, Jesus, why don't you do it? Have a heart to help us.
Hattersely's reference to the Salvation Army caused me to recall the story of William Booth. He was a Methodist preacher, too, you know. "Willful Will" they called him, but Booth became disillusioned with the political wrangling of the Methodists. So he left the church and started a Christian mission in the poverty stricken East Side of London that

reached out to the worst. That Christian mission became the Salvation Army, which declared war on poverty and homelessness. Or, as William Booth said:
"While women weep, as they do now. I'll fight.
While children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight.

While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,
I'll fight, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end."
That was one hundred years ago. It seems like the kind of war all of us could get behind, the war on poverty, the war on homelessness. Maybe it's time for another William Booth. If you have a heart, help us. Discipleship is a matter of your heart. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face.
He'll give you a lift.
He'll give you a life."

4

“Twins, a sister and brother were talking to each other in the womb. The little sister said to the little brother, ‘I believe that there is life after birth!’ Her brother protested: ‘No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling on to the cord that feeds us.’ But the little girl insisted: ‘There must be something more than this dark place, there must be something else where there is light and freedom to move.’ Still she could not convince her twin brother. Then...after some silence, she said hesitantly: ‘I have something else to say, and I am afraid you won’t believe that either, but I think there is a mother!’ Her little brother now became furious: ‘A mother, a mother, what are you talking about? I have never seen a mother and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have so let’s be content.’ The little sister finally said: ‘Don’t you feel this pressure sometimes? Its really unpleasant and sometimes even painful.’ ‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘what’s special about that?’ ‘Well,’ the sister said, ‘I think this pressure is there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face! Don’t you think that’s exciting!”

(Unfortunately I do not know the source.)

In that story the twin brother did not believe there was anything beyond what he could see and hear and touch while his twin sister believed there was a life beyond what she could see and hear and touch. That story reminds me of life. We are like the twin sister, we say “we are only passing through,” meaning that this life is preparing for eternal life. We live in strange times with lots of tragedies and appalling accidents and many people dying young. During times like this we need more than ever to remember that our lives here on earth are a pilgrimage to God. We are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father since baptism. Like the girl in the womb who could not see her mother, we too believe that eternal life follows this life and that there is more to this life than we can see and hear and touch.

On the mountain Peter, James and John saw that there was more to Jesus than met the eye. During the transfiguration they got a glimpse of the future glory of Jesus’ resurrection. Like them we too get glimpses of the presence of God in our lives. We get glimpses of God in the love we receive from other people. We get glimpses of God when badly needed help suddenly comes to us from out of nowhere. We get glimpses of God when we look back over our lives and what we couldn’t understand in the past makes sense now. We see glimpses of God when we see someone making a sacrifice to help somebody else. We see glimpses of God in the beauty of a fine day, a nice beach or a beautiful sunrise or sunset. We see glimpses of God when a passage from the Bible or a homily strikes a cord in our hearts. We get a glimpse of God when we spend time in prayer and experience the loving presence of God in our lives. We get more than just a glimpse of God when we receive the body of Jesus in Holy Communion. The Transfiguration coming early in Lent encourages us to continue our Lenten penances because it reminds us of the glory of Jesus risen from the dead.

When Jesus and the disciples came down the mountain Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about his transfiguration until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Of course they did not know what he meant. Unknown to them the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration was preparing them to accept the scandal of the cross.

There are some great truths you only discover through experience. Recently, I ran across a "fascinating list" that carried this intriguing title: "Great Truths About Life That Little Children Have Learned." Let me share a few of these "great truths" with you.

(1) " No matter how hard you try you cannot baptize a cat."
(2) "When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair."
(3) "Never ask your 3-year-old brother to hold a tomato... or an egg."
(4) "You can't trust dogs to watch your food for you."
(5) "Don't sneeze when somebody is cutting your hair."
(6) "School lunches stick to the wall."
(7) "You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk."
(8) "Never wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts... no matter how cute the underwear is."

They would understand this only afterwards when looking back. The good times take us through the bad times. So when our cross is heavy or when we are tempted to despair about the meaning of life, let us look beyond the pain of the present moment and remember those times when we got glimpses of God, those times when God sent us his consolations. Let us look beyond the pain of life and see the presence of God in our world, and the offer of life that God wants to make to each of us. Let us look beyond the illusion of happiness that this life offers to the real happiness that God offers us. Let us look beyond this world to eternal life with God. As we heard in the second reading today,

With me bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy. (2 Tim 1:8-9)

In our first reading we heard Abram being called by God to leave his present place and go to a new country. (Gen 12:1-4) He was seventy-five when called to leave his own country but he had to wait another twenty-five years for the promised son Isaac to be born so that the promise of future descendents could be fulfilled. That was a long wait. It was a long time for him to be continually looking beyond the present to the promise of God. With faith we can see what we cannot see with our eyes. The girl in the womb knew there was more to what she could see and hear and touch. On the mountain Peter, James and John looked beyond the appearance of Jesus and saw his future risen glory. Let us look beyond, and see that God is really with us. God has not left us on our own, God is with us.

Those personal experiences of God’s love remind us that heaven is our destiny and that we too like Jesus will be transfigured after death. Paul wrote,

“our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body ...” (Phil 3:20-21)

Jesus returns from the dead and meets his disciples in different places: the garden, the Emmaus Road, the seashore, the Upper Room. He witnesses to them that he is alive, this guy back from the dead with a body. He isn't content to send them a postcard from heaven: HAVING A GREAT TIME. WISH YOU WERE HERE. No. He shows up among them as his own witness. Not airy spirits or pious ghosts, but bodies like his own with wounds to show, bodies that witness to resurrection, threatening the world with life. For the only Easter some people may ever see is the Easter they see in you and me.

The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain is also awaiting each of us after death. Why can we look forward to being transfigured after death like Jesus? Because we are baptized. When we were baptized God put his seal on us. What was that seal? The Holy Spirit. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit on the day we were baptized. We were marked out as God’s property, belonging to God. Let us hold our heads high. When the media or your friends criticize the Church and make you look foolish because you are still a practicing Catholic, hold your head high. Because you have been baptized Jesus will transfigure our wretched bodies into copies of his glorious body. Can the media do that for you? No. They have not put the seal of the Holy Spirit on you. They have not marked you out for God, as God’s property. They have not claimed you for God as his son or daughter. But when you were baptized you were sealed with the Holy Spirit as God’s own child.

On the mountain Peter, James and John had a privileged experience of Jesus’ transfiguration. Instead we are like the girl in the womb, living by faith and not by sight, believing that there is more to life than meets the eye. Therefore we can hold our heads high because we were sealed with God’s Holy Spirit on the day we were baptized. We treasure those moments - little transfigurations - when we experience God’s personal love for us, knowing that they tell us heaven is our destiny and that Jesus will transfigure our wretched bodies into copies of his glorious body.