

Transfiguration Sunday – February 14, 2021

Think of a time when something happened to change the narrative of your day or even your life.

Perhaps you have been driving through heavy rain, straining to keep control as approaching cars splash pooling water, then the road bends to your right as the sky begins to brighten and there is the most beautiful rainbow you have ever seen. What will you remember of that day?

We are all getting weary of our winter rains and now the deep cold. But in sheltered corners here and there a daffodil is pushing out of the cold earth. The energy of life surprises us once again. When the flowers and trees blossom forth, what will we remember about winter?

About 3 years ago now, my brother phoned with the sad news that his son had died tragically. I went back home, back to the farm where Bruce and I were both born. Grief was wearing the family down and I was to preach at Tim's service.

I went for a walk down the lane where I had trod for many years as a kid. Often enough with a fishing pole, heading to the pond my Father had created from a spring that rose on our property. I was walking with the weight of grief, and trying to sort out in my mind what I might say at the funeral. I know the person grieving should not preach, but I was asked and needed to find a way.

Our farm used to be divided into 10 acre fields with fences dividing each. Fences that had chokecherry bushes, burdocks, stone piles and whatever. Years ago a bulldozer came and cleared those fences, burying the rubble and creating one huge field. But in one spot on that field, near the lane, there was a gravelly patch and there was a single tree, a sugar maple, that somehow had evaded that bulldozer.

I stopped and looked at that tree. It was like my brother: planted, wouldn't move, stubborn, but bearing fruit where it was put. Content. I was like its seed blown by the wind, landing here and there, scarcely taking root before I drifted off again.

But there is the shared soil, the common root, the generations of our family in this place for 170 years.

There is a past and there will be a future to share.

In my sermon I referred to Viktor Frankl's memoir, **Man in Search of Meaning**, an account of his years in a Nazi Concentration Camp. He survived because he was a Physician and a Psychiatrist and was useful for the Nazi's to have around. In his book he spoke of people whose future was cut off, like a branch of a tree. There was no future for 6 million of his fellow Jews. What word do you have to express your sorrow? Is hope even possible?

What of my nephew who died of addiction? What hope was there to offer?

We fortunate ones grow up with the fancy notion that life is a clean canvass on which we will paint our masterpiece. Life is a sweet apple from which we will take a juicy bite. For far too many, this is a myth. The future is closed, blocked by poverty, illness, violence, hatred, addiction.

So we weep for too often we have no answer to give that brings meaning or comfort.

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Being a disciple of Jesus could not have been easy. Long days, no guarantee of decent food or a place to sleep. Crowds pushing in, authorities calling out threats, Roman soldiers taking notice.

Then one day, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to join him in prayer.

They climbed a hill and suddenly Jesus was transfigured – his face aglow, his clothes dazzling white – and then appeared Elijah and Moses – and then a cloud and a voice that would make you want to hide – “This my Beloved Son with whom I am pleased.”

(Peter had suggestions but it would have been better if he just remained quiet.)

What happened?

I can't explain it any more than I can explain a Maple Tree or a Rainbow or a Daffodil peeking through the weeds. But I will say this:

The past has meaning:

God lit a bush on fire and told Moses he had better things for him to do than tending sheep. A nation was brought into being, a Covenant sealed with the Living God.

God found Elijah hiding in a cave and called him back to reality. No long speeches, no time out for therapy. Just get up and go. The true prophet was born – the one for whom God's Word bore consequence, fulfilment.

Jesus knew what could happen in Jerusalem – but now? He's only got started. But, it seems the time to turn his face towards Jerusalem has come.

There is only one road and it goes through Jerusalem and it continues to Calvary. But now?

This is the cup from which Jesus must drink.

What of us?

- We can be aware that prayers are answered but not always the way we prefer.
- We can be more mindful of that great cloud of witnesses who surround us, who urge us on.
- We can be more curious of those moments when the narrative of our life gets interrupted, turned upside down. Is someone telling me something?

Our Western Civilization has had a tiny virus interrupt the sweet narrative of endless growth, prosperity and fulfilment.

Our Churches' narrative has been interrupted as we discovered that Christian faith is not inherited and cheap grace does not convert hearts.

In the Garden, God planted 2 trees; The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and we took a big bite out of that one! There is also the Tree of Life and it awaits the End of all our narratives, there for the faithful to taste forever the goodness of God.

In this in-between time what voice are we hearing?

What vision draws us closer?

There is the narrative of the daily news, the chatter, the disappointments . . .

And then there is the bud, the flower, the rainbow – there is the music, the art, the poem – the Cross. There is another sound, another rhythm, another vision.

It is not always easy to accept, for this vision will lead to a Cross. It will not be the Cross Jesus faced. But we will need to die to a certain narrative that tells us that we really have no gifts to give, no song to sing, no hand to lift and carry. The narrative that says, “What can I do? Isn't it all hopeless? Isn't the whole thing rigged?”

So we remember Moses and Elijah, we remember Peter and James and John, we remember Mary and Mary and Martha . . . we remember this unpredictable God who insists that we are more than we think, and can be more brave than we want to believe. **That no one is lost to God in this life or the next!**

As we walk about these next days, let's turn down the volume on the daily narrative that floods our brains and listen rather to the music of our hearts. What am I really hearing, seeing?

Wordsworth captures this sense at the end of his poem Daffodils.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils

Elijah had a breakdown and gave up. God had a plan and only Elijah would do.
Moses killed a man and ran away. God had a plan and only Moses would do.
Peter had a hole in his net and Jesus had bigger fish to fry.
Jesus has not forsaken the Church . . . *maybe there is something too . . .*

A word . . . a sign . . . a song . . . with God, any bush will do. (Amen)