

Critical Moments

Matthew 17:1-9

Sunday of the Transfiguration

6th March 2011

You may or may not have noticed over the past couple of weeks that one of the world's largest sporting events is presently under way – The World Cup of Cricket. Taking place in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the tournament is spread over a period of 6 weeks and, unbelievably, has a global TV audience so huge that ranks it just behind the World Cup of Soccer and the Summer Olympics. 91 countries in all were involved in the qualifying stages with 14 now playing in the finals and, included in that 14, is none other than the land of the Maple Leaf, the true North strong and free. And there you thought that Canadians were only good at playing hockey and winter sports!

However, with the ever-increasing number of immigrants in our country from the cricket-playing nations of the world, there is a huge interest in and following of the game that is not always immediately evident. And the Canadian cricket team, although considered one of the minnows of the international tournament has played very creditably so far facing some extremely stiff opposition in their games.

Actually, the game of cricket has a long and illustrious history in Canada. It was brought to this country by the British Army and there are records of it being played in Halifax in 1749, in Quebec City in 1759 and at Fort York in 1792. There even is a record, in the form of an Inuit engraving, of cricket being played in 1822 near the island of Iglooklik at a latitude 3 degrees north of the Arctic Circle when during an exploration of the Northwest Passage two Royal Navy vessels became stuck in the ice.

In 1844, a game played between Canada and the United States at the St. George's Cricket Club in New York City became the earliest international sporting contest in which our country was involved. 20,000 spectators turned out, says one source, and \$120,000 or \$1.5 million in today's currency was placed in bets on the outcome.¹

According to local sports historian, Don Barrie, there is also a local dimension to the history of the sport of cricket in Peterborough. In one article he wrote for *The Examiner* a few years ago he said that there was actually a cricket practice ground on the lower area of Victoria Park just across from this very church. That, of course, would have to have been in times before all the trees grew up there. Much as I enjoy knowing this, I do hope that there were no cricket games played on a Sunday morning or balls batted against our stain glass windows.

Cricket is not a fast, reactive sport when compared to hockey and can take 3 or 6 hours or 3 or 5 days to

complete depending on which form of the game is being played. Basically, one team bats, sets up a score – maybe 150, 200 or even 400 or 500 runs – then the other team has to chase down that total before their players get out. Because it develops more slowly, the game creates a great deal of inner psychological stress demanding huge amounts of patience and concentration. Like golf, the players have a great deal of time to think about what they are doing and to second-guess every move they make. This, of course, gives plenty of scope for the best players to “come apart at the seams” and for the underdogs to perform well above their ability.

One of the most enjoyable features of cricket is that, after a long build-up, the game can come to the point where everything is very finely poised. There is a critical moment when it can go one way or the other. The scales are in perfect equilibrium and it just needs one little mistake or one stroke of brilliance by a player to tilt the momentum towards one or other of the teams. There is an equal possibility that one team will score the number of runs to win. But there is also the same possibility that the other team will manage to get them all out before they get that number of runs needed.

Isn't it just the same in life? Doesn't there so often seem to be a crucial time in personal, national or world affairs that determines how the future will unfold. The outcome is finely balanced. Things might go this way or that way. But then something happens, either by happenstance or by intention, to shift that balance in one direction or another. Greek philosophy had a word for that special moment in time. *Kairos* (καίρος). A decisive moment. A significant moment. A crucial moment. A moment on which hinges so much of the past and the future.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus alludes to just such a moment, “There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”²

This past week, we may well have seen that critical moment in the turbulent events presently taking place in Libya. Although Muammar Gaddafi has been in power for over 40 years, and would seem to be so well-entrenched that it would be very difficult to dislodge him, still the very fact that so many of his supposedly well-trusted lieutenants, senior cabinet ministers and army commanders, have changed sides would seem to suggest that the momentum is now flowing away from him and towards the rebels. Maybe it was the warning from world leaders that Gaddafi and his cronies would be held

accountable in future times, backed up by the announcement of a planned investigation by the International Criminal Court at The Hague, that shifted the balance. Maybe, just maybe, that was the tipping point that will, in time, bring about the downfall of Gadaffi and pave the way for Libya to join the international family of free and open democracies. Time will tell.

Talking about critical moments, the Day of the Transfiguration was just such a significant time in the lives of the disciples. That was the day when Jesus took the three disciples, Peter, James and John up Mount Tabor, when his face changed its appearance and his clothes became dazzling white. And a voice was heard as if it had come out of heaven.³

Up until that moment, the disciples – Peter, James and John – had probably been in two minds about this man Jesus. Could he really be believed? Was he really worth following? Should they really stake their lives on him? I am sure they had their doubts. But then they heard that voice of endorsement from on high, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased.”⁴ And that was the critical moment in their minds and hearts.

Instantly, they recognised that this was a supremely significant occasion. From their long and deep knowledge of the Old Testament, they immediately realised that what was being played out in front of them had strong parallels to Moses’ experience of glimpsing God on Mount Sinai,⁵ as well as connections to the story of Elijah and Elisha.⁶ And the presence in a vision of these historic heroes of the faith served to confirm what the disciples had increasingly come to believe but hesitated to say out loud: “This man Jesus is none other than God’s Son, the Messiah, the very one in whom the divine has entered the realm of humanity.” So, in that moment, they recognised this man as truly being who he claimed to be. This man truly was the Son of God. This man truly was one in whom they could put their ultimate and enduring trust.⁷

Looking back over our lives, I am sure that each one of us could say to ourselves that there is a time we now recognise as being a critical moment, a tipping point, in our lives. A time when – despite all doubts and reservations – we personally decided to throw in our lot with Jesus Christ. A time when we made up our minds to become involved in the greatest cause of all.

Maybe that critical moment happened as the result of someone in our lives, a mother or father, brother or sister, a grandmother or grandfather, a Sunday School teacher, a minister, a coach, a friend – someone we looked up to, someone whose judgement we respected, someone who was a role model. Maybe something they said or did made the crucial difference at the right moment in our lives.

Yes, we can look at people in our past who were instrumental in pointing us to the Christian Faith. But, by the same token, I wonder if we ever consider the impact

we might have had on the lives of others down through the years. Something we have done or said might well have been the critical moment that made a crucial difference in someone else’s life. Maybe, unbeknownst to us, we gave someone the power to resist the wrong and do what was right. Maybe, unwittingly, our faith tilted someone who was bitter and angry towards God. Maybe we pointed that person in the direction of his amazing grace.

But not just in the past. Maybe right now, in the very present, your Christian faith and life are making a big difference by being the critical moment for others around you. Maybe someone is taking their cue from you. Maybe someone is following in your footsteps.

A young mother with a large family in Costa Mesa, California, tells how one day she could not get even the smallest chores done around the house because her youngest son was constantly under her feet. No matter where she went he was on her heels. When she stopped to do something and turned around, she tripped over him. After trying unsuccessfully to interest him in playing with his toys, she finally began to lose her patience and asked him why he was acting this way. He looked up at her with his sweet green eyes and said, “Well, Mommy, in Sunday School my teacher told me to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. But I can’t see Jesus’ footsteps, so I’m walking in yours.”⁸

Sometimes you may think your Christian faith and life don’t really matter in the greater scheme of things. But never forget the impact for good you may well be having, right now, on someone else, young or old, in your family, in your church, in your circle of friends. Someone right now may be walking in your footsteps. Unbeknownst to you, your Christian faith, life and example may well be serving as that critical moment, that tipping point, in the life of someone around you. Just when you wonder if being a Christian is worthwhile, you may just be making a huge difference in another person’s life. And making it in ways you would not believe.

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¹ Canada’s Colourful Cricket History, *Cricket Canada*, <http://www.canadiancricket.org>

² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3, 218-224

³ Matthew 17:1-9

⁴ Matthew 17:5

⁵ Exodus 24 & 34

⁶ 2 Kings 2:1-12

⁷ Luke 9: 28ff

⁸ Davida Dalton, as told to Joellen Johnson, “In His Mother’s Footsteps,” Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Aubery, Nancy Mitchell, *Chicken Soup For The Christian Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1997). Cf. King Duncan, “Setting An Example”, www.eSermons.com