

# Transforming Moments

Luke 9:28-36

## Sunday of Transfiguration

14<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Do you remember that old series of jokes about changing a light bulb? For instance,

How many economists does it take to screw in a light bulb? None. If the light bulb really needed changing, market forces would have already caused it to happen.

How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one - but the bulb has got to want to change first.

How many country and western singers does it take to change a light bulb? Five - one to change the light bulb and a quartet to sing about how much they long and pine for the old one.

How many existentialists does it take to change a light bulb? Two. One to screw it in and one to observe how the light bulb itself symbolizes a single incandescent beacon of subjective reality in a netherworld of endless absurdity reaching out toward a cosmos of nothingness.

How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? How do you mean change the light bulb? My grandmother donated that light bulb!

How many United Church members does it take to change a light bulb? The United Church chose not make a statement either in favour or against the changing of light bulbs but suggests that people find the light bulb that works for them, and explore alternative lighting options that are inclusive and environmentally friendly.

How many pastors does it take to change a light bulb? We don't know, everyone fell asleep while our pastor was giving a sermon on the subject.

Well, here's another lighting question. Not one that's a matter of humorous guesswork or idle speculation but of hard fact. How many Canadians does it take to light an Olympic cauldron? The answer is, of course, 12,000 – not forgetting the help of some 200,000 volunteers along the way. But 12,000 is the number of people it took to get the lighting job done in Vancouver on Friday evening. 12,000 is the number of hands through which the Olympic flame passed over the last 106 days – including, we are proud to remember, the young hands of one of the members of our congregation, Emma Blackwood.

It was amazing that the Olympic Torch relay, which was organised to hype up interest in the Winter Olympics, took on a life of its own and became such a high point in so many people's lives. You could see from the look on the torchbearers' faces, from the glow, from the smiles, from the excitement, that it was such a special moment in time. One that was filled with great pride and enjoyment. One that they would remember forever. One that was filled with such

meaning and significance. One that somehow they wished they could hold on to and savour for longer than the few minutes that they actually got to carry the torch.

Of course, it's not just the torchbearers who have this Olympic high. In coming days, many of the athletes participating in the Vancouver games will, of course, have similar moment-in-time experiences. Olympic games have a tendency to do that to athletes. Especially events that take place amidst such stunning alpine scenery as there is around Whistler. During the hustle and bustle of practising and performing, suddenly a moment in time will break in upon those athletes' consciousness. Suddenly, they will realise where they are. And what they are doing. And how privileged they are to be there. They will want to hold on to that moment and freeze-frame it forever. And they will say to themselves or to their team-mates, "It is good that we are here."

2,000 years ago, three men had a similar moment-in-time experience.<sup>1</sup> Peter, James and John were invited by Jesus to accompany him up Mount Tabor, a fairly steep-sided, upside-down-cup shaped hill, rising 1,350 feet above the Plain of Jezreel, offering a panoramic view of the Sea of Galilee 10 miles to the north-east and Nazareth 6 miles to the north-west.<sup>2</sup> While Jesus was praying, his face positively began to shine like the sun and his garments glistened with intense whiteness. Though the 3 disciples were sleeping, they woke in time to see Jesus being transformed right before their eyes.

Now this was a very special moment for the disciples. It was not time in the sense of the Greek word "chronos" (χρονος) which means a length of time or an expanse of time. It was a "kairos" (καιρος) which means a decisive moment in time. A significant moment. A crucial moment. A moment on which hinges so much of the past and future. Such a moment suddenly and unexpectedly rushed in upon the disciples. And they wanted to perpetuate this moment for eternity. So much so, they spontaneously said to Jesus, "Teacher, it is good that we are here."<sup>3</sup>

None of us, of course, may ever scale the heights of an Olympic or a Mount Tabor kind of emotional or spiritual high. Nevertheless, we all can experience similar moments if we are alert and aware, and if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Such moments can happen anywhere and, usually, when we least expect them. Maybe it's at a baptism when we consider anew the wonder of God's marvellous gift of a little child. Maybe it's when we see a young couple taking their vows on their wedding day. Or, in a communion service as the bread is broken and the wine is poured. Or, maybe that moment in time is on Valentine's Day when we

become aware, all over again, of the love we share with someone special. Or, maybe the moment is in hearing that beautiful melody which seems to haunt our soul. Or, when we are suddenly confronted by the miracle of nature in all its beauty and wonder. Times when we are moved to say, “It is so good that we are here.”

CBS journalist, Charles Kuralt, told of how he once spent an unscheduled night on Mount McKinley in Alaska. The small plane that brought him and his photographer to do a story never came back and they were left stranded in a derelict cabin. Kuralt was upset and angry because he had a busy schedule ahead and needed to get back to his office. That night, though, they were surprised by Nature in all its splendour. Something they had never before witnessed in the same way. The planets and the stars were so clear and so near they felt they could almost reach out and touch them. The Northern lights were dazzling with their shimmering colours. Suddenly, they realised they had the best seats on the planet for Nature’s most spectacular show. And they didn’t want to leave. “It is so good that we are here,” they said to each other.<sup>4</sup>

Now, we can’t schedule such moments in time. They just happen. Suddenly. Unexpectedly. But we can be on the lookout for them. And when they happen, we need to store them up in our hearts and minds for the future. These transforming moments are what give us the strength to live through the tough times of our lives.

Associated Press reporter, Terry Anderson, tells how he and his fiancée, Madeleine, were visiting her father in a village near Sunderland in the north-east of England some years back. Though brought up in church, Terry did not consider himself particularly religious. So he was surprised, as they wandered through the pleasant English hamlet, that he felt drawn to a particular old church. He opened the old oak door, sat down on a worn pew, looked up at the altar and the cross gleaming in the shadows. Suddenly, he felt a strong sense of coming home, that he was where he belonged. There and then, he reaffirmed his faith.

For the next 6 months, he wondered why he was drawn to that church and why he suddenly felt that he needed a closer relationship with God. He couldn’t figure it out. Until one day, the next year, as he worked as a Middle-East correspondent in Beirut, he was shoved at gunpoint into the back of a green Mercedes and taken hostage by Hezbollah. During the nearly 7 years of his ensuing captivity, a seemingly never-ending period when he often wondered if he would ever see the outside world again, he was sustained by that experience near Sunderland. He said later that he only found the courage to endure the long years of years of captivity because he believed God was with him. And that belief came from his “mountaintop experience” in that small village church. Unknown to him, God was preparing him for what lay ahead.<sup>5</sup>

It’s strange how these moments-in-time, moments that change our lives, break into our lives unexpectedly and give

us a strength beyond our own strength.

Another person who gives witness to this fact is Presbyterian pastor and best-selling author, Frederick Buechner. He recalls one low time in his life when his daughter was seriously ill how God came to him in a most unusual way. “I remember sitting parked by the roadside,” Buechner writes, “terribly depressed and afraid about my daughter.” As he was sitting there, he noticed a car that seemed to come from nowhere and bore on its license plate a word which he says was “the one word out of all the words in the dictionary that I needed most to see exactly then. And that word was TRUST.”

Sitting in his car alongside the highway, God’s message was revealed on the license plate of a passing car. Buechner said it was difficult to describe such an experience. “Was it something to laugh off as the kind of joke life plays on us every once in a while,” he wondered. Or, was it the word of God? Maybe for others it was something to laugh off as a coincidence, he said, “but for me it was an epiphany.”

Ironically, says Buechner, the owner of the car turned out to be a trust officer at a local bank. After reading of the incident somewhere, the trust officer paid a personal visit to Buechner one afternoon. He presented Buechner with the license plate which bore the word which he so desperately needed to see that day, TRUST. Buechner placed that license plate on a bookshelf where today, though now a little rusty around the edges, it still brings back that moment in time and reminds him how God is there to help and guide him if he will only trust in him.<sup>6</sup>

Transforming moments-in-time are all around us. Moments when faith can be deepened. Moments when our relationship with God can be strengthened. Moments when Christ comes alive for us and glows with hope and meaning for our lives. Look for these moments. Savour these moments. Store them up in mind and heart. Because they are exactly what we need to sustain and strengthen us as we journey along the road, and face the many obstacles and challenges that life brings to us all.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:28-36

<sup>2</sup> Geographical background

[www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/mount\\_tabor.htm](http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/mount_tabor.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:33

<sup>4</sup> King Duncan, *Surprised on the Mountaintop*, Christian Globe Network, 2005

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1991), pp. 49-50.

Collected Sermons, King Duncan, Dynamic Preaching, 2005, 0-000-0000-20 adapted