

Life changing experiences  
February 3, 2008 – Rev. Jim Cullen

Exodus 24: 12-18 & Matthew 17: 1-9

There are a couple of political stories that I found to be interesting this week. Both stories have to do with people talking about changing lives, offering people a new vision. The first is a story I read in Report on Business about the Premier of Newfoundland, Danny Williams. It tells the story about how he borrowed \$2500.00 to start a TV cable company that grew into a multi-million dollar business. It tells that as a lawyer he is remembered as one who pioneered the battered wife syndrome as a defense for murder, and represented 39 victims of sexual abuse at the notorious Mount Cashel orphanage.

When his success in politics brought him to the Premier's office he reflected on his motivation. *"The biggest thing we had to change when we came into government was the psyche of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We wanted to make sure they felt very positive about themselves and had self-confidence, that we're as good as the rest of Canadians."* Changing how people feel about themselves is no small task.

The second story comes from a news-clip I saw concerning the US primaries in Florida. The clip showed Caroline Kennedy, President Kennedy's daughter, with her uncle Senator Edward Kennedy announcing their support for Barack Obama. Both Ms Kennedy and the Senator said they were supporting Senator Obama because he offered a vision, a new sense of hope for America. He was the candidate who could change lives because he could change how people thought about themselves.

What is it that changes people's lives? Many things really. Sometimes change comes through pain. The loss of a job, the loss of health, the loss of a loved one makes an impact on us. These realities change our lives.

There are other experiences that change our lives – discovering new interests, meeting new people, doing something we really want to do. And "falling in love". Recall Andrew Lloyd Webbers words, sung by so many,

*"Love, love changes everything. Hands and faces, earth and sky. Love, love changes everything. How you live and how you die. ...Days are longer, words mean more. Love, love changes everything...Love will never let you be the same."*

The gospel lesson this morning is a story about change, change that is difficult in put into words. Jesus took Peter, James and John, and together they went up the mountain, away from the people. There they had a life changing experience. One of them must have told the story. Jesus was changed before them. His face shone like the sun. And then they saw Jesus talking to the two giants of the OT, Moses and the prophet Elijah. And from the clouds came the word, ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."*** And then they saw no one.

We might wonder why Jesus took them along. Did he climb the mountain to experience this strange and awesome encounter for himself or for their sake? One of the biblical scholars a few years ago was fond of saying that he thought that nothing actually happened to Jesus on the mountain. What took place, he felt, was the opening of the eyes of the three disciples to see Jesus as he really was – a glory that of necessity had to remain hidden, because human eyes could not always bear to see it revealed. This may or may not be an adequate understanding for you, but worth some consideration.

The disciples come away from the experience with a number of conclusions. First, they are aware of the unique relationship between Jesus and God. It is a story that affirms that connection. They are aware that Jesus is connected to the spiritual giants of the past – that Jesus is part of God’s activity that began generations before. There are some events and experiences in life that are just too profound to be put into words, let alone explained to others. Jesus cautioned them not to say anything. I assume that their demeanor, their facial expressions, their new sense of life, would indicate to others that they were indeed different people – never again to be the same.

Peter is so overwhelmed that he wants to do something – build something – a monument, three monuments – something he could hang on to. He finds it hard to let go of this experience. Yet he knows that he is with Jesus, the beloved on God. Today, we are invited to experience God’s presence in our lives by climbing our spiritual mountains, and to gather around our spiritual table.

We have an opportunity to take the spiritual experiences we have, the insights that draw us closer to God and live them out in the context of everyday life. This applies to home and community. It applies to being part of a faith community, a congregation, a church family.

I wonder how many times Holy Communion, The Lord’s Supper, has been celebrated in this church – 100’s and 100’s of times. We take two very ordinary things of life: bread and wine or for us bread and grape juice. (At St. John’s, Campbellford, on one occasion, the purchaser made a mistake as bought prune juice.) We do this, not because it is our idea. We do it because, Jesus, with his disciples did it and he said “Do this in remembrance of me.” The bread – the body of Christ: the wine, the blood of Christ, even the life of Christ becomes for us the connection to his love and sacrifice. A communion hymn that is not used much anymore put it this way “*Here, O my Lord, I see you face to face, here would I touch and handle things unseen, here would I grasp with firmer hand eternal grace, and all my weariness upon you lean.*”

High spiritual moments happen in diverse places and circumstances: in the readings of the scriptures, singing the hymns, prayer and meditation, the graciousness of others, the beauty of nature, the challenges of life, the exposure to the unknown, the spectacle of love. The bread and wine – the gifts of God for the people of God. *Love changes everything. God’s love will never let you be the same.*