

Moments That Mark Us

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Vouchsafe to bring us by thy grace, to see thy glory face to face this day and evermore.
Amen

There are events that mark us so that what was before that event and everything that follows after are separated as if by a great divide. Sometimes these are events in our personal lives. Sometimes they are events that happen to huge groups of people, a whole country, a culture, sometimes the whole world. For better or for worse, perhaps sometimes for a mixture of both, we are changed by these events. Sometimes, sometimes those events transfigure us, change us in a way that lets light be where there was not light before. It's about that, that I would like us to think and pray together this morning.

You know some of these events, some of the great ones in our lives. The first one in my life that marked my childhood happened to me in the fifth grade, November 22, 1963. Anyone who lived that day knows where they were when they heard the news. For the first time in my life I saw an adult teacher speechless. I could tell something terrible had happened though I didn't learn for a few minutes what it was.

In my parents' generation it was December 7, 1941 and an event that I will mention in just a moment, that marked their lives. And every one of us in this church today found our lives marked on September 11, 2001 so that life is not the same ever again.

We also have personal moments that mark us. Maybe a diagnosis, maybe the first time your parent hit you or your spouse abandoned you. These events and they've happened to all of us, mark our lives and we are never the same. Think for a moment with me now about one such moment in your personal life. Not the great ones that I've mentioned that we've shared, but a personal moment that seared your life. How can that moment be glorified or transfigured? They seem to stand in different worlds, glory and transfiguration over here on a mountaintop where everything seems clear and wonderful. And then those searing, awful moments, how can they be brought together? Is there any way to bridge them?

The story of Jesus' transfiguration says yes. The transfiguration may not happen in just one moment on a mountaintop. In our lives, more often, transfiguring and glorifying of those searing moments happens slowly over time, sometimes painfully slowly. That moment that I said I would mention that also marked my parents' generation happened on this day, August 6th, 1945. Any of you who were alive that day remember what happened. And all of us who have studied history know, even if we weren't yet alive, what happened that day. The world has never and will never be the same again because of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. It has seared our world, not just the

people of Hiroshima, not just the people of Japan, not just the people of the United States, but all people. We've all been marked and that mark needs transfiguring and glorifying.

The disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration needed that mount and that experience because they themselves, eight days before, had had one of those personal searing moments in their lives. The introduction to the gospel today says that this transfiguration happened eight days after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ of God, but what that introduction didn't remind you is that right on the heels of that Jesus said, "I am going to be betrayed. I am going to be tried and put to death. I am going to be crucified." They needed the news that their best friend, the One on whom they placed all their hopes, the news that He was going to die in a horrible way, they needed that news transfigured and glorified. Or I imagine they couldn't have gone on.

Sometimes these moments that sear us and need to be transfigured happen because of events from the outside over which we have no control. But, sometimes they happen because of things that we have done. We sometimes sear our own lives and the lives of others by what we do. I'd like to tell you about one such moment from my own life.

I was thirteen years old. I was playing softball with my friends in the front yard of a very good friend's house just down the street. It was probably an August day, who knows, maybe it was August 6th. Everything went fine in the game until the last inning when we were tied up and I was at bat. My best friend was on first base. He would have been the winning person to cross the base and he tried to steal second and the referee said that he was out. I was sure he wasn't and I discovered a rage inside myself that I did not know gentle Bill had. I walked with my bat to second base, which was a crab apple tree, and I stripped every branch that I could reach from the tree with my bat and came within an inch of throwing the bat through the plate glass picture window of the house. It was a terrifying moment for me, to discover that I was capable of such rage over a simple injustice. How do simple moments like that get transfigured? How do tremendous, terrifying moments like August 6, 1945 get transfigured? How does glory meet darkness?

To begin to get a glimpse of that I want to tell you a story about someone else. Her name was Sedako Sesaki. She was two years old and living in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped. She lived far enough away from the epicenter that she was not killed and she was not harmed by the firestorm though some 70 to 80 thousand citizens of her city were instantly vaporized. She appeared not to have any aftereffects. She grew up healthy and in fact was the fastest runner in her fifth grade class, boys and girls. But in November of her fifth grade year she began to develop lumps on the back of her neck and then purple spots on her legs. She was taken to the hospital and was given a diagnosis of leukemia, almost certainly radiation related.

In August, after her diagnosis in November, she had not been out of the hospital once until August the 6th. She tried to make her way, with her family, to the Peace Park that is in the center of Hiroshima that marks the spot where the bomb was dropped. She was too weak to go and had to return to the hospital. About that same time someone, no one knows who, delivered 1,000 folded paper origami cranes to the hospital. This is probably

to small for you to see, but it is a folded crane from one single piece of paper. A thousand of them were delivered to that hospital. Some of them made their way to Sedako's room. There is a legend in Japan that if you fold one thousand cranes the gods will grant your wish. With the coming of a crane to her room Sedako decided she would ask the gods to cure her and she began folding cranes. She folded some 800 of them before she died.

How did Sedako Sesaki manage to move from being a citizen of a city destroyed by a horrible bomb, a young girl whose life had been wrecked by radiation sickness, to someone who was praying for her own healing and the healing of the world through the making of paper cranes? I don't know how she did it. But what I believe is that the Christ who was present on the Mount of Transfiguration, transfiguring the deep sadness of His disciples over the news that He had to die, was also present with her. For that Christ knows no boundaries, not of belief, or nation, or gender, or class, cannot be held back by radiation or war. He does not pick sides, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, the United States, but seeks to transfigure and glorify every searing event that happens to each human being and the whole world. Sedako caught the spirit of Christ, even if she did not know that it was coming from Christ and she folded cranes as long as she lived and her classmates completed the task in time for her funeral. A thousand paper cranes at her funeral. Now in the center of Hiroshima, there is not only a Peace Park, but also a monument to Sedako Sesaki and the movement of folding paper cranes has spread across the globe as people fold these cranes and pray for peace.

What about you and me, what about what has seared your life and mine? Can we begin, either literally or figuratively, to fold paper cranes and pray along with Christ, that what has seared us and seared others and continues to sear our world, will be healed, that glory will meet destruction and transform and transfigure it. Have you already begin doing that in some small way in your life? If so, Christ is standing at your elbow helping you to fold those cranes. If you haven't yet begun, and there is some rage that makes you want to strip the crabapple trees bare, or maybe lay waste a whole city, then for God's sake pray for the grace to begin folding a crane. If you don't know how to begin, come to this meal where Christ himself will place himself in your hands, seeking to transfigure your hurt and mine, your rage, my sadness and turn the world into a folded paper crane, a place of peace. When you find even a hint of that beginning then the Alleluia's of Easter will rise in you. Quietly or triumphantly and you will know that resurrection is not just a fond tale. Thanks be to God.