

STAND UP AND SHOW YOUR SOUL
Haslett Community Church
Transfiguration Sunday, February 18, 2007

I noticed that Kurt has been doing a series of sermons on the Beatitudes. I might respectfully add a new one: Blessed are you who come to church even when you know the pastor is going to be away.

Epiphany, the season of Light, is the time when we SEE God revealed through Christ. As we become aware of increasing amounts of daylight, this is a good time to notice the radiance of Christ reflected--in nature, in creative arts, in others, in your self.

The scripture stories in Epiphany shed light--light on who this Jesus was and who Christ is. When you have an epiphany, it's as though a light comes on in your awareness. "Wow!" you say. Well, today's readings shed light on two men primarily--Moses and Jesus. The well-known stories of Moses coming down from being on the mountain with God, his face ablaze with light, and Jesus taking Peter, James and John up the mountain where they witnessed Him alongside Moses and Elijah in a blaze of light, were intended to let people then and now know of the special quality of blessing placed on these men.

I want to focus on the special quality of blessing God places on *you*, me, every one of us. Thomas Merton, the oh so earthy, yet inspired, monk had such an experience one day in downtown Louisville. The monastery, Our Lady of Gethsemani, is out in the middle of nowhere, near the small town of Bardstown, KY. It was rare for Tom to visit the "big city" of Louisville. He writes: "In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers."

He realizes that, in spite of his monastic vocation, he is just one among others, and that it is glorious to be human. He continues, "I have the immense joy of being MAN, a member of a race in which *God became incarnate*. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

We are all walking around shining like the sun! What an epiphany Tom Merton had! Can you see it around you? Will you believe that you, too, are radiant with God?

STAND UP AND SHOW YOUR SOUL! The phrase comes from a short piece written by the author and Jungian psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estes, whose best-known book is *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. In this "Letter to a Young Activist During Troubled Times", which I think was written just after 9/11, she says: "One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times like these, to be fierce and to show mercy toward others, both, are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do. There will always be times when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it; I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate. The reason is this:

In my uttermost bones I know something, as do you. It is that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth, who you serve, and who sent you here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours: they are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here.”

A young man recently wrote in an email to me, “I want to learn to courageously bear my gifts for the sake of the world.” Courageously bear my gifts. When I first wrote that, I wrote “b-a-r-e” instead of “b-e-a-r”. In a way both apply, do they not? We bare our gifts, as well as bear them. Look at your newspaper any day of the week for numerous examples of persons courageously standing up, whether you agree with their views or not.

- Against the rules, a grieving mother tries to speak to the President of the United States. Failing that, she sets up camp near his Texas ranch and goes on to become a symbol of courage for countless others who believe this war is wrong.
- A man, actually the newest member of the Lansing City Council, is selling Old New Boys on the street when a sad-looking woman stops and gives him \$2. He engages her in conversation, she is soon in tears, and he takes her to talk in the YMCA nearby where he learns she has nowhere to live. But she gives away her \$2. Is she shining like the sun? As he listens, is he?
- Through an almost inconceivable set of circumstances the eyes of two women--one North American, one African--meet across a crowded room somewhere in Europe. They come together somewhat shyly, share their stories, stand up and show their souls, and ultimately the lives of countless people on both continents are changed for the better.
- A comfortable middle-class American couple chooses to share their home with special children, children whom no one else wants.
- A stranger finds your wallet in the store parking lot and returns it, unopened, to the service desk.
- A young man walks from Lansing to Detroit to draw attention to the plight of the needy caused by the elimination, without replacement, of Michigan’s Single Business Tax.
- An uneducated mother of 5, married at age 14, foster mother to countless children opens a drug education center for all the kids in the community.

Now, this is the place where a preacher sometimes says, “My friends, you and I will probably never have to make the kind of sacrifices Jesus and the saints made, but we can do little things in our daily lives.” Yes. But, you know what? You and I MIGHT have to make *dramatic sacrifices*, too.

It isn’t enough of be comfortable with “the little things”, as precious and beautiful and helpful as they are. We must stand up and show our souls, let them radiate healing and peace-producing light, let them speak truth to power, be it with our children, our local community, or at higher levels of power, both public and private.

God so *longs* to work through us. Don’t hide your light under a bushel; you have too much to offer. In the entire history of humanity, there never has been a YOU and there never ever will be again.

Courageously bear your gifts. Do not despair. Do not run and hide. Seek God’s help and protection. God will be faithful, for God has transfigured YOU to be a divine reflection--to BE Christ-- in this dark world.

The Light *shines* in the darkness and the darkness CANNOT put it out. Amen.

Carol Ingells