

Transforming Water Beetles

I read a story some time ago of a group of men who had a problem. They owned a lake fed by an artesian well. As you know the water from an artesian well rises to the surface under natural pressure from deep within the earth. This produces a steady stream of clear, cold water. This was the problem. The lake was a swimming lake and the water was so cold, that it made it uncomfortable. So they developed a simple way to solve the problem.

They sank a 6-inch steel pipe in concrete and placed it over the well-head, driving it deep into the ground. They threaded the top of the pipe and on that placed a cap. But no sooner had they dusted off their hands, than the force deep within the earth simply lifted up everything, pipe, concrete and the cap, right out of the ground.

Pilate, the Roman soldiers and the Scribes and Pharisees tried to seal Jesus away like the men tried to seal that well but it didn't work. They hung him on the cross until he died. They buried him in the tomb, sealed the tomb and placed guards outside. They also stood back and dusted off their hands and said, "There, that takes care of that." But the Christ was born to rise. He was born to be transformed. The Process theologian John Cobb identifies Christ as "creative transformation." Anytime the "structures that produce misery" are transformed, the Christ is present. The "Christ appears in the creative transformation of all life everywhere." (P.57)

Preachers don't usually indicate their purpose for a sermon. My purpose today is simply to raise our level of awareness to the transformative presence of Christ in our everyday lives. There is nothing really new about that. It is Easter and the time to remind ourselves how God is working in our lives. I want to do that by observing nature, relationships and the events of life.

I THE TRANSFORMATIVE CHRIST IN NATURE

The evidence of God's transforming presence is, of course, viewed in the flowers which adorn the chancel. God's creation is coming to life again. You can't keep it buried in the ground. But that is a part of nature which is obvious and we usually take it for granted. There are other transformations, creative transformations in nature that are not so obvious.

The great movie director Cecil B. DeMille was drifting along in a canoe on a lake in Maine. He drifted into the shallow water near the shore and he began to notice all the little water beetles scurrying around on the shallow bottom. One of them crawled up on the canoe, fastened its feet in the gunnel and died.

Three hours later, still floating in the warm sun, DeMille said he witnessed a miracle of nature. The shell of the water beetle cracked open and a tiny head emerged. Then the wings unfolded and out popped a beautiful dragonfly. The water-bug now dragonfly, tested his wings and then took off like a 747. He sailed across the surface of the water, going farther in a half second than a water beetle could crawl all day long. The water beetles below were very much unaware of the transformation that had taken place.

I have a little booklet which I give to parents to explain death to children. It explains death from the prospective of the water beetles. The little colony noticed that occasionally one of their members would lose interest in the group,

climb up a reed and disappear. So, they make a pack with each other. Whenever one of them climbs up a reed they will come back and tell the others where they went. After his transformation one dragon fly looks down and sees his friends the water bugs on the bottom. He tries to get to them but he just hits the surface of the water and bounces away. Of course he realizes that he can't return. But even if he were able to return to his friends they wouldn't recognize him because of his new body. He will just have to wait until they become dragonflies too. Then they will understand.

It is a simple little story but it bears out a real truth. Since the order of nature is such that water bugs can't be kept down then neither can we be kept down. If God planned the transformation of a water beetle, there are transformations for us.

II THE TRANSFORMATIVE CHRIST IN PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Not only do we observe the Christ's transformative presence in nature, but we see it in people and relationships. Sometimes the Christ is revealed in a single moment and slips away with little recognition.

In our every day lives God seems to open the door to heaven ever so slightly to reveal His transformative power. My wife Diana was shopping at Mayfair a few days ago. This just happened to be the day that The Disney Store had its grand opening. They had Mickey Mouse standing in the center of the mall greeting all the children. There were so many people that parents and children had to wait in line to greet Mickey. Diana stopped to observe the looks on the kids' faces and the frustration on the parents.

Almost immediately, she noticed a little boy standing with his father about half way the length of the line. He was wiggling and dancing around so that she thought he desperately needed to visit the restroom. But a full bladder wasn't the problem. Just as Mickey put down one child, this little fellow broke away from his father and made a dash for Mickey. Mickey saw him coming and just open his arms for him. He just leaped into Mickey's arms. Here was one excited and joyful child and one embarrassed father. The people who had been waiting in line just seemed to understand.

Heaven's door was opened in that transformative moment. Smiles appeared on the parents' faces. You could just feel the joy and excitement of that little boy holding on to Mickey Mouse. You could see the "Kingdom of God" in the relationship that Mickey Mouse has with all the children. It is no wonder Jesus held the children in his arms and proclaimed that such is "the kingdom of heaven."

The transformative Christ is present when people use their gifts in counseling and teaching to influence transformation. At the little church that I served in northeast Georgia, there were three men in the church who were past retirement. All three were successful and had contributed much to their church and community. I never will forget a conversation I had with one of them. Despite the toughness of this cattle farmer he stood before me with tears welling up in his eyes to reveal the anguish of not being able to read. I searched for people in the community who could tutor him privately and in confidence. I wasn't successful. The people who tutor at Laubach center, are transforming peoples lives. The persons who teach and counsel encourage transformation of peoples' lives. The Christ of Easter is a part of that relationship.

Parents, as you nurture your children to the maturity of adulthood you participate in the Easter event. As painful as it might be to give the keys to the

family car to your 16 year old with a driver's license the ink hasn't dried on yet, it is an important step in their transformation to responsible living. During the Easter holidays our oldest son is, for the first time, part of that Florida invasion. I don't know whether or not their celebrations in the deep south encourage maturity or not. However, just being away from home will encourage that. The Roman soldiers couldn't keep the Christ in a tomb and we can't keep our teenagers locked in the house.

III BORN FOR TRANSFORMATION

Just as the Christ was born to rise, so are we born for transformation. If we follow the ways of our Lord. If we love as he asks us to love. If we cherish ourselves and others as he commands, our lives will have purpose. We are born to be transformed.

But transformation is not always easy or comfortable. In these days of hostile company take overs, some who are most productive have lost their jobs. Such a blow to one's self-esteem can make a person feel they have no value. However to realize that God loves and has given us gifts to spend in the world will provide the energy to rise above the rejection. Few people have known the rejection of one of our land's greatest presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Before he was elected president, he failed in business twice and was defeated in his bids for public office eight times. But each defeat was just an opportunity for transformation.

We are born to be transformed. St Paul said "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above..." As we allow the spirit of Christ to transform us, our minds are raised to a higher level of perceiving. We can see the gates of heaven open in the little events, even the painful events. We can be transformed

Last, it is people like us who can be transformed and who transform others. I am always curious about people's lives after they graduate from high school. We can browse through our old year book and notice those who were voted, "most likely to succeed." But sometimes those who seem very ordinary do some very unordinary things.

Cardinal Roncalli was one of those kind of people. If you know anything about him, he was elected Pope because he was considered harmless. He was a little roly-poly man that was expected to keep the Roman Catholic Church running on an even keel. But he was responsible for convening the Second Vatican Council. We know the Second Council open the doors so fresh winds of transformation could blow through the Catholic Church. He became one of the most important Popes in church history, just a man who was harmless.

CONCLUSION

We are born to be transformed eternally. A minister wrote about an electric clock that they had in their house. It was chiming at six o'clock in the evening when the power went off. The house was engulfed in darkness and silence. After thirty minutes the power suddenly came back on and the clock resumed its chiming just where it left off. So shall it be in the resurrection. Dying may plunge us into darkness but the light will come back on when we step into the presence of the transformative Christ.

If God has a plan for transforming water beetles, what fulfilling transformation does he have for us both in this life and the life to come? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Dear God, your Symbol of undying love first made Himself known to the people who truly loved Him and missed Him. Make the Spirit of Christ known to us on this resurrection day. Particularly make the presence of your sacrificial Lamb real to those who feel cut off from you because of guilt and maybe do not understand how you might love them. Make yourself real to those for whom the joy of resurrection has gone out of their lives.

As our Lord dealt patiently with the problems of Thomas, deal patiently with all your children who are handicapped by closed minds. Deal patiently with those who fear that the resurrection news is too good to be true and hold back their faith by the intellectual barriers of doubt. Make your transformative Spirit known to them and set them free.

Truly You have risen O Lord! Let that message be our experience, so that the smoldering coals of life maybe transformed to a roaring fire in the lives of these your children. Hear and answer our prayer in Christ's name. Amen.