

**Transfiguration Sunday, August 6, 2017**

**What We Take for Granted**

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Journalist Arthur Gordon recalls a time when he almost didn't go, almost refused the opportunity that presented itself in his book titled *A Touch of Wonder*. In the book, a collection of stories and memories about meaningful and powerful moments in his life, he wrote about an afternoon when his children were young and asked him to take them out on their little boat to explore a remote beach not too far from their house. Any of us who have the love of beach combing, walking along that magical place where the waters meet the land, and discovering what the two elements bring to each other: things like shells, bits of beautifully worn pieces of glass or driftwood, lost parts of ships or some pieces of the past, can perhaps relate to the eager enthusiasm of Arthur's children.

However, Arthur did not share his children's enthusiasm or desire to go the beach. For him, it meant quite a lot of effort. He wrote he'd have to be the one to drive the boat, and getting to it would have meant trudging through mud, and mud combined with children and a dog always translates into a mess that will need cleaning up. Besides, he wrote, there was a football game on television that same afternoon which would have offered perhaps more entertainment for much less effort than a trip to the beach. So his initial response to his children's request was the one both children and parents are well acquainted with, the non-committal response that shows the parent heard what the child said but don't really want to do it. Arthur told his child what many parents tell their children, "We'll see."

As most children can tell you, the translation of "We'll see" is usually "No." But Arthur's children were not so easily put off. They tried again, and again, and wore down their father, who grudgingly, he wrote agreed to take them to a beach. As he reflected on the memory, he recalled he didn't appreciate or delight in his children's excitement, he just guided the boat and observed their appearance: the oldest looked ridiculous in an old, stained sailor's cap, the middle child was practically drowning in an old oversized sweater so full of holes he wondered at its ability to provide warmth, and the youngest needed a haircut. He wrote that it is quite normal for parents to take their children for granted most days, and that day he almost didn't go certainly started out that way.

When they reached the beach, Arthur chose to stay in the boat and wait while his children and dog bounded out onto the beach and took off to see what treasures they could find while he waited, feeling tired and cold.

The sudden barking of the dog and cries from his children calling, “Dad, come quick!” roused him from the boat and he followed their shouts and barking, worried about what was wrong, hoping no one was hurt.

What he found was a dog and three children who were all fine, but who had discovered a loon stranded on the beach, its feathers covered in oil. After a lot of back and forth discussion between father, who preferred to let nature to take its course, and children who thought it was their responsibility to do something because they found the bird, the consensus was reached to wrap the bird in an old towel in the boat and take the bird back to their house where they tried to wash the oil out of its feathers.

The day was transformed into a real adventure, with a new purpose, one to help the poor loon. And after a lot of bites from the frightened bird, soap, rinses with water, the family freed the bird from the oil that had caked its feathers and released it back to the sea where it swam away. As they watched the loon, the youngest child looked at his father and said, “Dad, if we hadn’t found that bird, it would have died, wouldn’t it?” Arthur responded that most likely would have been the case, and his son said, “Remember Dad, we almost didn’t go.”

To this day, Arthur remembers.

It can be so very easy not to go. To stay where there is no mud that will need cleaning up later, where one is out of the wind, and weather. To hold tightly to routine. Not that there is anything wrong with routines, in and of themselves, they provide structure and that can be helpful and good. But too much routine, or routine for its own sake, can be a sleepy way to walk through life, it can lull us into taking so much of life for granted. Sometimes a break from routine can be a gift, the kind that wakes us up to see and appreciate the life around us, the life we are a part of. Which is what happened to Arthur and why he never forgot the day he almost didn’t go to the beach.

We could also say the same for today’s celebration and remembrance of the Transfiguration of Jesus, which offers us a change of pace from the lessons we are used to hearing during this Season after Pentecost. Usually the lectionary readings for this season are centered on the amazing things Jesus said, like the parables he told, and the wonderful things he did, like his miracles of feeding thousands.

These stories and parables have offered people comfort and reassurance for thousands of years, and hearing them can help us reflect on our lives and ministries as both individuals and a parish by helping us look at our lives and what we are doing and at the same time look at Jesus’ life and what Jesus was saying and doing. However, the transfiguration wasn’t something Jesus did, it was something that

happened to Jesus while he was praying. It was not expected, and we heard in our Gospel it woke up the disciples Jesus had brought with him, the ones that the author of the Gospel wrote were tired, and if they hadn't stayed awake would have missed the event. One can imagine, perhaps they almost didn't go when Jesus asked them to come up to the mountain with him to pray.

The tiredness of the disciples may not be just physical exhaustion, it can be the same kind of tiredness Arthur Gordon wrote about the day his children wanted him to go to the beach, the kind of tired way to walk through a life where we always have all these things to do: you know, the bills we have to pay, errands we need to run, phone calls we need to make, emails we need to answer, deadlines we have to meet, the list goes on and on. And while we all have responsibilities, it can be easy to start taking life and the people in our lives for granted.

Perhaps the same was even true for the disciples, who even though they got to join Jesus in his ministry, and heard the words of his parables for themselves and saw the healing and feeding miracles in person, perhaps even they could get lulled into a complacency of forgetting who Jesus is. Scholars and commentators and Christians of all walks of life can forget who Jesus is. It can be easy after hearing parable after parable to start to think Jesus was just another wise teacher, a dispenser of wisdom through allegorical stories. It can be easy after hearing how he fed thousands to think Jesus is just another social justice hero calling us to let go of our own prejudices and share what we have in order to make the world a better place.

Now I'm not saying these aren't aspects of Jesus, but I do believe it can be too easy to limit Jesus to these aspects and forget who he is. He is more than another wisdom teacher, more than another champion for social justice, he is the Son of God, whose words and actions aren't only wise and just, they are how he chose to show us who God is. Through Jesus we can see God is not an angry, vengeful God waiting to strike us down when we do something wrong. God is love, healing, forgiving, generous even when we human beings choose to be otherwise. Jesus showed us God is life and light, which means death is not the end and darkness is nothing to fear.

The Transfiguration is a glimpse, and a reminder of who Jesus is: fully divine and fully human; in Jesus we see God's glory, and God's love radiating as light on that mountain top. And, we also see what God wants all human beings to be: bringers of life and light we see in Jesus.

When we hear about events like the transfiguration, it might be hard, harder than when we hear Jesus' parables or miracles, to wonder what this event means for us who are sitting here today, who chose to attend church instead of whatever other

option we could be at. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much for us to emulate or be inspired to follow because the Transfiguration is about that happened to Jesus.

Yet that is one of the gifts of the Transfiguration. It invites us out of the usual by reminding us who Jesus is, and that means reminding us it isn't always about us. Being a Christian, a follower of Jesus is about Jesus. It isn't necessarily a convenient way of life, it is all of life, the life we are a part of, the life that shows God's love like a shining light. How we choose to embody that is up to us. However we choose, it is important to have times or events that remind us not to take this life or God's love for granted. To remember that life is an opportunity to walk with God, not just get things done, and to show the world what God's love looks like. For Arthur it was his children's fierce insistence to embrace life and do what they could to help the day they almost didn't go that helped him see God's love.

For any of us, it could be different, but the point is to keep our eyes open, even when they might feel like sleepy eyes, open for the ways God's love shines through daily routines and answer the call once again to let that light shine through us in what we do, what we say, how we live the life rooted in God's love for us all.