

February 27, 2022
Transfiguration Sunday

Meditation: “Limited Time Offer”

In her later years, my mother had a favourite sweatshirt that she often wore at the trailer or around the house. It said, “She who must be obeyed!” It was a quote from eccentric criminal lawyer Horace Rumpole, a character in the British television show *Rumpole of the Bailey*. When Rumpole was speaking about his wife, as when a colleague might ask him to join him in a round at the pub, Rumpole would reply that he had to check with ‘she who must be obeyed.’

Mom used to watch the show, some might say religiously, on the US network PBS – the Public Broadcasting Service. As a public broadcaster they did not sell advertising to support their network. Rather, they held fundraising drives to pay their costs. It was during one of those fundraising drives that they were offering the sweatshirts that mom wore. For a pledge of a certain amount a sweatshirt would be sent to you, but only if you made your pledge before the end of the show. If you waited until the show was over before calling in your pledge of financial support, there would be no sweatshirt for you. The offer of a free sweatshirt that said “She who must be obeyed,” was a time limited offer. Once the show was over, there was no going back.

I don’t know why, but that memory came back to me early in the week as I was thinking about a theme for worship today. A theme is important. From it you then look at prayers and hymns to fit with the theme. The scripture lessons contained two stories of transfiguration. The Old Testament lesson in the book of Exodus talks about the transfiguration of Moses – his face shining as he came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant. And, of course, the transfiguration of Jesus we read in Luke’s gospel. As I read and reread the lessons the one thing that jumped out at me was Peter’s desire to build three huts or shrines – one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. Peter wanted to capture the moment and preserve it. I think his intent was, at some point in the future, to be able to return to the shrines and the moment of the transfiguration. But Jesus, Peter, John and James left the mountaintop without staying to build shrines. They left and went back down the mountain to the lowlands where people were in need of ministering to. The moment on top of the mountain was just that, a moment. It was a limited time event that could not be returned to in the future.

This is what I was thinking on Tuesday. And then Thursday happened. Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine. I believe that he wanted to return to the glory days of the Russian Empire, and that he wanted to go down in history as the leader who restored the Russian Empire. The problem is, you can't go back to something that is gone. It was a limited time reality whose time is over. You can try to recreate it, but in terms of human life and injustice, the cost of trying is staggering. And the Russian Empire may have been great for those at the top, but it was full of inequity and injustice and misery for the majority of those who lived in it.

I don't know about you, but my heart breaks for the people of Ukraine who are confronted by this great evil. And my heart breaks for the people of Russia who are opposed to this invasion of their neighbour by their leader. And I feel impotent, unable to do much beyond offering prayers for peace, and supporting the refugees through the efforts of groups like the Red Cross. By the way, did you know that the federal government will match individual donations of up to \$100,000, to a total of \$10M, that are made to the Red Cross for Ukraine between now and March 18?

Jesus did not want to stay in the moment on the mountaintop. He wanted to get back down the mountain to resume his ministry of healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, setting free those in bondage, and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. The moment on the mountaintop was a limited time event. The fulfillment of the kingdom of God lay, and still lies, in the future. Returning to the past is not the way forward into God's kingdom. Returning to the past, with all of its injustices and inequities, does not build justice or equity for all, or reconciliation between peoples, or reconciliation between humankind and God.

As a church, the body of Christ, we cannot return to the glory days of the 1950s and 1960s when there was a building boom of gymnasiums and Sunday School wings, and the sanctuaries were full, and the coffers were overflowing. We can't because that was a limited time reality. We live in a new reality and we are called to something that lies yet beyond us – the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. God's vision of a world where there is justice and equity for all does not lie in the past, it lies in the future, a future that we are called to help work toward. How we do that in the 2020s will be different than it was in the 1950s. But forward we must go. There is no going back, Vladimir Putin notwithstanding. Today is a limited time offer, use it wisely.