

The Transfiguration – February 14, 2010
Holy Trinity, Buffalo, NY
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LOVE AND BIBLICAL RELEVENCE

Sometimes it isn't easy to get inspired when it's time to preach a sermon. Sometimes the lessons don't make much sense - or they do - but I have difficulty figuring out how to talk about them. And there are times when a topical sermon is appropriate, but nothing interesting or provocative is happening.

But today presents the opposite problem – there are too many things one can preach about. For instance, the first lesson from Isaiah is wonderful. It's about Moses meeting God on the mountain and receiving the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments are written. When he appears to the people, his face is glowing with such brilliance that the people are forced to look away.

Interestingly, early translators of the phrase “glowing countenance” mistakenly translated it as Moses “having horns” – the text is easily confused. Freud, unfortunately, only knew the mistranslation and consequently developed some interesting – if ill founded – theories about Moses and Judaism. The jacket on Freud's book about Moses actually depicts Moses with horns because the cover is a photo of Michelangelo's statue of Moses, which also mistakenly has horns.

And then there is the Gospel lesson that tells the story of the Transfiguration. It's a strange story, and it apparently was a way for the author to connect Jesus with Moses.

And when it comes to current events, we have many questions about the disaster in Haiti and how one interprets natural catastrophes.

But we aren't done yet – today is special because today is Valentine's Day – a day on which we celebrate love. And - in one way or the other - we all do. If you are young you do so in anticipation of it. If you are mature, it is a work in progress. And if you are older, there are all of those great memories. There is something for everyone.

Of course, when you are really young you have a perspective on love and marriage that can be a bit distorted. Here are some quotes from children. Eric, who was six was of the opinion that; **Marriage is when you get to keep the girl and don't have to give her back to her parents.**

Kelly, who was nine had a thought about how you knew whom to marry – she said: **You flip a nickel and heads means you stay with him and tails means you try the next one.**

Nine-year-old Carolyn was a bit more analytical: **My mother says to look for a man who is kind ... that's what I'll do ... I'll find somebody who is kinda tall, and kinda handsome.**

At what age a person marries is important to some children. Carol, who was, 8, suggests, **Eighty-four! Because at that age you don't have to work anymore and you can spend your time with each other.**

But, on the other extreme there was Bert who said: **Once I'm done with kindergarten I'm going to find me a wife!**

Some kids are concerned with how couples get together. Martin suggested that: **A couple first goes out together; they tell each other lies and usually that gets them interested enough to go out a second time.**

Eight-year-old Craig said: **Many daters just eat pork chops and French fries and talk about love.**

Some children had suggestions about how to go about getting married. Kristen suggested that: **You should just ask the people who read COSMOPOLITAN.**

Anita said: **It's better for girls to be single but not boys; boys need somebody to clean up after them.**

But, eight year old Will just got fed up – he said: **It gives me a headache to think about that stuff – I'm just a kid – I don't need that kind of trouble!**

Well, that's what kids think about marriage – what about grown-ups and marriage? Valentine's day notwithstanding, love is only part of the picture when it comes to marriage – compatibility is also critical.

A friend of mine told me about going to his doctor just before he was getting married. The doctor said he wanted to point out something very important for a successful marriage. He said a marriage consists of 10% sex and 90% compatibility. He said you can get away with 80% compatibility – even 70%, or 60% compatibility. But, you need all of the 10%!

The bottom line is that marriage needs to be based on friendship. And friendship often depends on common ground. When I was in college – 55 years ago – my sociology professor said that 80% of the couples who got married in the United States lived within 10 blocks of each other.

Half of the kids in my church youth group married within the congregation.

I don't know what those statistics would be today, but I do know that most of the couples I've married in recent years didn't meet each other until they were in their 20's and many even in their 30's.

When a couple grew up within 10 blocks of each other they had a lot in common. They had the same religion, same socio-economic background, same ethnicity – they had extended families with common favorite foods – from pork and sauerkraut, to blintzes, to pigs in the blanket spaghetti and meatballs.

But if you watch television ads today you might think that when couples meet, the kind of beer they drink is their common bond.

Now all this makes for difficulty in marriage. And to add to these issues we have the different ways in which men and women deal with problems like depression.

Elayne Boosler said, **When women are depressed they either eat or go shopping. Men invade another country.**

And there is also the phenomenon of an unprecedented number of women in the work force. It was reported a few weeks ago that for the first time in this country there are more employed women than men. There are more women than men in law school these days and almost an equal number of men and women are in our seminaries. And this makes for a struggle when a married professional couple has children. Gloria Steinmen observed, **I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and a career.**

So here we are with a diverse and volatile cultural milieu in which young people come together from divergent backgrounds and expect that that their common love of Molson's Golden, or LaBatt's lite will be their bond in marriage. It won't work!

And, believe it or not, the Bible speaks to this situation. The biblical stories about "Adam and Eve", and "Jesus' temptations", and "Jesus' redemptive work" are about as relevant as you can get to our human condition. Cultural changes notwithstanding.

One little boy noted that the reason Adam and Eve weren't embarrassed about being naked when they were in the Garden was because they didn't have mirrors. But, we do – and we know what we look like – and most of us know that we don't belong in the Garden of Eden.

And remember the story about Jesus being tempted by the devil at the beginning of his ministry? Jesus had been fasting for forty days and he was hungry. The devil tells him to use his authority to turn the stones into bread. He tells Jesus to jump off a high building and have the angels come and save him so that he can show off his power. The devil takes him to a high mountain and says that if Jesus worships him he can have all of creation as his kingdom.

Temptations that confront us all – from a free lunch – to power over others – to using religion for our own self interest and satisfaction.

Our human condition is not something that the Bible ignores. And neither does our religious tradition. That is why our marriage liturgy reads:

The Lord our God, in his goodness, created us male and female and by the gift of marriage founded human community in a joy that begins now and is brought to perfection in the life to come.

Because of sin, our age-old rebellion, the gladness of marriage can be overcast and the gift of the family can become a burden. But, because God, who established marriage, continues to bless it with his abundant and ever-present support, we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored.

And remember the blessing that follows:

The Lord God, who created our first parents and established them in marriage, establish and sustain you, that you may find delight in each other and grow in holy love until life's end. Amen.