

## LOVE COMES DOWN

Last Epiphany, 2008

In about 10 days our country will celebrate one of Hallmark's favorite days, Valentine's Day. It is a day set aside to remember loved ones, a day for expressing that love with cards, chocolates, special cookies, personal ads in the paper, flowers, and candle lit dinners with champagne. The day can be a mountain top experience, a peak experience filled with warmth, the aura of romance, and love.

A few years ago I saw an article in The Livingston (Montana) Enterprise about Valentine's Day and romance. How long, the writer wondered, was the romantic mood of Valentine's Day expected to continue? The writer queried, that after the roses, the chocolates, the card, and the candlelight dinner, what was next? What happens the next day or next week, how long would the "love" mood last?

The word "love" is an often misused one. "I just love chocolate!" "I love the Virginia Symphony!" "I really love those Washington Red Skins! (or, perhaps, the Patriots or Giants!)," "I just love my new car!" "I love your suit, your house, your garden," and so forth. The word is used in a variety of situations and contexts, very few of which are truly describing deep and abiding love. Romantic love is wonderful and important, however, the author of the news article gently mocks the often intense but short-lived Valentine's Day kind of romance calling it "some sort of love Olympics!" Intense but short-term, romance provides dopamine and serotonin that ramps up our brains with emotion, floods us causing sensory overload that often clouds our good sense, according to a recent issue of Time Magazine. However, it doesn't have all of the ingredients for the staying power of a love that can sustain us in

times of tension or turmoil in our lives. That takes the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Today, the Last Sunday of Epiphany, we witness a real Olympian event in the life of Christ and in the life of the Church. This Sunday is a major turning point in the Church's year and in the life of Christ. Today, instead of basking in upcoming thoughts of Valentine's chocolate, roses, or champagne, we experience the Transfigured Christ, God's Beloved Son, turning his blazing face from an exhilarating mountain top experience towards certain death in Jerusalem at the hands of his enemies. This is not a very romantic message, but one that reminds us of the deep and abiding love of God.

Just as the Transfigured Christ turned his blazing face towards the dark days ahead, we also, this week, turn away from the light of Epiphany into the shadows of Lent, where, like Jesus in his journey to the cross, the love of God sustains us. This love that is shown to us today in the Matthew's Gospel account of the Transfiguration, is, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, nor is it arrogant, rude, insist on its' own way, nor does it end." This is the love Christ brings to us, freely given by God, and the love for which Christ died. We are filled with the awe of the light on the mountain top today, but we need to prepare for the dark days ahead as love comes down to the valley, and we journey with Christ to his death.

We don't want to come down, we want to stay in that moment of the "mountain top experience." We, like St. Peter who encouraged Jesus to stay in the pinnacle moment of high intensity forever, to live in the dazzling scene of the awareness of the Oneness of Jesus and God, we desire that, too. It was that unambiguous revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, as God's Beloved Son, that captured the disciples who accompanied Jesus that day, bringing awe and magnificence that was far from the difficult world below.

But, much to Peter, James, and John's dismay, Jesus came and touched them, bringing them back to reality, and ordered them to descend from the mountain, from the glorious experience of a spiritual high, of receiving the vision of Light, of affirming that their rabbi was the Son of God. However, by listening to Jesus' as God instructed, they could leave the mountain top with the certainty of God's Love upholding them through the dark night of Calvary. "Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.'"

Isn't it part of our human and fallen nature to not want to come down from the mountain peak, from a "high" of any sort? We want Valentine's romance to go on and on, we want the Patriots or Giants to keep making those touch downs, we want Christmas to never end, or a delicious meal to stretch into eternity! We will try any number of artificial aids to make the Olympic love-a-thon last forever.

Jesus certainly must have been exhilarated in that moment on the mountain with the presence of Moses representing God's Law and Elijah known as the ultimate prophet. Yet, like Moses who received the Ten Commandments in the forty days he spent in God's radiant cloud on a mountain top before coming down to bring God's Laws to the people, Jesus takes us down the mountain, back to the real world where we have to live. He knows he has to come down to face the reality of his future. He descended for **our** sake.

For, you see, love cannot stay on the crest of the hill. Love must come down. Love must go where it is most needed, not at the pinnacle of excitement, romance, youth, beauty, virility, or a high of any kind, but in the valley of the shadow of death where, like Christ and his disciples, we are supported and sustained by God's

love, by Christ's Light. St. Peter writes, "You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

God's love persists when the glory has faded, when the romance has fled, when the curtain has dropped on the stage set, when our team has lost the game. Love never gives up. Love does not even require reciprocity. You see, God's love comes down to the hospital bed or Hospice room, it visits the AIDS orphans in Africa, the refugees in the Sudan, it comes to our door in the form of a caring friend, it resides in the Food Bank and homeless shelters, it embraces grieving families, visits the lonely, it sustains our troops in moments of fear and darkness, it goes to Jerusalem where the enemy waits. "Jesus came and touched them, saying 'Get up and do not be afraid.'" Matt. 17:)

Jesus turns his back on his glory, his radiance, the moment of conclusive affirmation of being named God's Chosen One. He comes down from the throne on high to enter the darkness of human suffering and human pain. He comes down for you and for me, he comes down to bring us the deep abiding love of God who walks with us in our struggles. God's Beloved Son comes down from the mountain to Galilee Church bringing his healing love and peace to each of you and one to another. Christ walks with you on your journey here at Galilee bringing you the faith, wisdom, grace, and courage to go forward in unity. We have to only to listen to him, to, "Get up and donot be afraid."

Whenever one human being reaches out for another in the midst of suffering, wherever a person in power stoops down to help another brother or sister, whenever the mighty bend to the lowly, there is the Lord. Whenever you do this, you are becoming Jesus' disciple, coming down the mountain with him to bring his love to one another and to your life. Basilia Schlink once wrote: "If the glory

of God is to break out in your service, you must be ready to go out into the night.” “Get up and do not be afraid.”

Whoever you are and whatever your pain, your worry, your hurt, your fears, your sorrows may be, this very day the power and radiant light of Christ reaches out to you, he comes down to seek you, to find you, to embrace you, to help you sustain your faith, to lead you out of darkness. Then Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’” (Matt. 17)

The real love Olympics, the love of Jesus, God’s Beloved Son, Transfigured by God, comes down from the mountain to Jerusalem and certain death. Love comes down, comes down to you and to me everyday when we descend the mountain with God’s Beloved Son transforming us and **enabling** us to live by faith in the radiant light of the glorious Resurrection. Jesus comes down to bring us a love that sustains us and will last much, much longer than any Valentine card, candlelight dinner, or chocolates (especially the chocolates!).

Thanks be to God for His Beloved Son! May we **listen** and “be strengthened to bear our cross and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.