

Life has a way of slipping up behind and slapping us in the head. Sometimes it is a gentle slap. Other times it is not. A man was driving down the road. He passed a traffic camera and saw it flash. Astounded that he had been caught speeding when he was doing the speed limit, the man turned around and, going even slower, passed the camera again. It flashed once more. He could not believe it! He turned, going at a snail's pace, and passed the camera one more time. Again, he saw the camera flash. He guessed there must be a problem with the camera and went home. **Four weeks later he received three traffic fines in the mail--all for not wearing a seatbelt.**

YES--Life can be cruel!

In his book titled **Not That You Asked**. . . , Andy Rooney listed 100 of his oldest and most fervently believed opinions. For instance, he said, *"I don't like any music I can't hum."* Some of us can relate to that. Or how about this: *"When I was young, I always assumed I'd like carrots when I got older, but I never did."* Or this one: *"If dogs could talk, it would take a lot of fun out of owning one."* On a more serious note, Rooney wrote: *"I do not accept the inevitability of my own death. I secretly think there may be some other way out."* Good luck, Andy. But here's the one I want you to think about: *"The middle of the night,"* said Andy Rooney, *"seems longer than it used to."*

Can anyone relate to that? If you have ever laid awake mulling over a deep hurt or a nagging worry, you know what he is talking about. **The middle of the night can be mighty long and lonely.** **The story of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration occurred at a time when the disciples were in the middle of a long night.**

The story is told by Matthew, Mark and Luke with an almost equal amount of detail. It is significant that each of the Evangelists introduces his telling of the story with the same word, **"after."** That word is something more than a connecting-link, a bridge thrown over a blank space of days; *it is rather the key which unlocks the whole meaning and mystery of the Transfiguration.* St. Luke begins his version of the Transfiguration story like this: *"About eight days AFTER Jesus said this. . ."* **HE SAID WHAT?** Let's go back and see.

Jesus had asked his disciples what people were saying about him. In response, Peter made his memorable confession--the first Apostles' Creed-- *"Thou art the Christ of God."*

Let the trumpets sound. This is one of those crescendo moments in the New Testament. Immediately, however, Jesus leads their minds down from these celestial heights to the lowest depths of degradation, dishonor, and death. *"The Son of man must suffer many things,"* he says to them, *"and be rejected of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."* And, in just a moment, he shattered the disciples' bright dream. *Like some fearful nightmare, the foreshadowing of the cross fell upon their hearts, filling them with fear, and gloom, and striking down hope, and courage, and even faith itself.* It would almost seem as if the disciples were unnerved, paralyzed by the blow, and as if an atrophy had stolen over their hearts and lips alike. The next six days are filled with silence, without words or deed, as far as the records show. **How shall their lost hope be recalled, or courage be revived? How shall they be taught that death does not end all, and that one shall find his life by losing it? The Transfiguration is the answer.** *Their experience on the Mount of Transfiguration would wake them in the middle of their long night.*

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ONE OF THOSE LONG NIGHTS WHEN YOUR HOPES WERE RUINED AND YOUR MIND AND HEART WERE FILLED WITH FEAR?

During the terrible storms created by El Nino in 1998, a devastating tornado hit a southern community. In a TV news interview a third grader who had huddled with her classmates in the elementary school hallway as the funnel cloud roared overhead was asked if she was afraid. She replied in a matter-of-fact way, *"No, I just cried and prayed to Jesus!"* **Have you been there? When you found yourself crying and praying to Jesus? It is amazing the things human beings can endure.**

Radio broadcaster Mort Crim tells of visiting a new Asian restaurant in his neighborhood. The place was already filled with customers. He remarked to the waitress that this new place seemed to be a success already. She replied that

she knew the restaurant would succeed because the owner had to climb over a mountain to get there. She wasn't exaggerating. As she explained, the restaurant owner and his family had been forced to escape from Cambodia and emigrate to the U.S. because of persecution under the Communist government. They had literally climbed over a rugged mountain to flee their country. And now in their new land, the family worked into the wee hours every night and they never once complained, the waitress reported. They were just so happy to be in America. She knew that their determined attitude and hard work would spell success for their restaurant.

We admire people like that, don't we? The longer the night, the brighter success shines in the light of day.

But when you are in the middle of that dark night climbing a mountain to escape an oppressive government, or sitting at the bedside of a loved one in their last hours, or lying in a hospital bed with tubes sticking in you, or going over your checkbook in the wee hours of the morning wondering how you will ever make ends meet, or watching helplessly as your teenager fouls up her life, or whatever your long night might be--it's hard at such times to hold on to the promises of God.

THE DISCIPLES WERE IN A DARK NIGHT. They had left everything they had and placed all their hopes in Jesus. Now Jesus tells them that he must be crucified. It is then when their hearts are numb with hurt and disbelief that Luke writes, *"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning . . ."* Then Luke writes, *"Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him."* (NIV)

In the middle of their long night, when their hearts were laden with anxiety and despair, the disciples became fully awake to the truth of the Gospel: Christ is the Lord of Creation. The fact that Jesus must be taken from them did not negate the promise that he had brought into their lives.

THERE IS A DAWN IN EVERY DARKNESS—A HOPE THAT FOLLOWS EVERY DESPAIR—A BEGINNING THAT FOLLOWS EVERY ENDING. The experience on the *Mount of Transfiguration* came at precisely that moment when the disciples were prepared to believe the worst about the future. **In the middle of their long night, THE MESSAGE OF 'HOPE' WAS DELIVERED.**

An unknown woman tells of losing her mother, whom she called, *"her dearest friend,"* to cancer. Always supportive, her mother clapped loudest at this woman's school plays, held a box of tissues while listening to her first heartbreak, comforted her at her father's death, encouraged her in college, and prayed for her, her entire life. When her mother's illness was diagnosed, the woman's sister had a new baby and her brother had recently married his childhood sweetheart, so it fell on her, the 27-year-old middle child without entanglements, to take care of Mother. She counted it an honor.

Now she sat at her mother's funeral. The hurt was so intense. She found it hard to breathe. "What now, Lord?" she asked as she sat alone in the hard pew, grieving. Her brother and sister had their families, but she had no one. Her place had been with their mother, preparing her meals, helping her walk, taking her to the doctor, seeing to her medication, reading the Bible together. Now her mother was gone, and she was alone.

Then she heard a door open and slam shut at the back of the church. Quick footsteps hurried along the carpeted floor. An exasperated young man looked around briefly and then sat next to her. He folded his hands and placed them on his lap. His eyes were brimming with tears. He began to sniffle. "I'm late," he explained, though no explanation was necessary. After several eulogies, he leaned over and asked, "Why do they keep calling Mary by the name of 'Margaret'?"

"Oh," this young woman replied, "Because that was her name, Margaret. Never Mary. No one called her 'Mary,'" she whispered. She wondered why this person couldn't have sat on the other side of the church. He interrupted her grieving with his tears and fidgeting. Who was this stranger anyway?

"No, that isn't correct," he insisted, as several people glanced over at them whispering, "Her name is Mary, Mary Peters." "That isn't who this is," she replied.

"Isn't this the Lutheran church?" he asked sheepishly.

"No," she said, "the Lutheran church is across the street. I believe you're at the wrong funeral, Sir."

The solemnness of the occasion mixed with the realization of the man's mistake bubbled up inside the young woman and came out as laughter. She cupped her hands over her face, hoping it would be interpreted as sobs. The creaking pew gave her away. Sharp looks from other mourners only made the situation seem more hilarious. She peeked at the bewildered, misguided man seated beside her. He was laughing, too, as he glanced around, deciding it was too late for an uneventful exit. She imagined her mother laughing. At the final "Amen," they darted out a door and into the parking lot.

"I do believe we'll be the talk of the town," he smiled. He said his name was Rick and since he had missed his aunt's funeral, asked her out for a cup of coffee.

That afternoon began a lifelong journey. A year after their meeting, this couple was married at a country church where he was the assistant pastor. This time they both arrived at the same church, right on time. This woman writes, "In my time of sorrow, God gave me laughter. In place of loneliness, God gave me love. This past June we celebrated our twenty-second wedding anniversary."

In the middle of our long, DARK NIGHTS God gives us HOPE. That is what Transfiguration is all about. *The dispirited disciples needed at that moment in their lives to see the GLORY OF CHRIST REVEALED.*

And when his glory was revealed, they were able to get their lives back on track. **And that's what many of us need to know in the middle of our long, dark night. God is still God. Christ is still Lord. Beyond the darkness--whatever that darkness may be--there is the dawn.**

Dr. Hope Kohler had a situation on her hands: one of her patients, five-year-old Billy, was suffering from an aggressive lymphoma. Billy's parents wanted their son to die at home in New Mexico, not in the Boston hospital where he had been treated. They couldn't afford a flight, so Hope set about finding transportation for them. She and the family got as far as Dallas, but Billy became too sick to continue. Commercial airlines wouldn't carry someone in his condition. Hope got Billy admitted to a local hospital; she stayed with him around the clock, trying to keep him comfortable. Finally, Hope located a doctor who owned his own plane. He got the boy home just in time; Billy died soon after landing in New Mexico. In addition to his name and dates on the tombstone, Billy's grateful parents inscribed one more line: **Hope Brought Him Home.**

That line could be added to tombstones all over this world: **Hope Brought Him Home.**

The experience on the Mount of Transfiguration restored the disciples' HOPE. In the middle of our long, DARK NIGHTS, may Jesus restore OUR 'HOPE' AS WELL!!

AMEN!!