

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Olympic Love"  
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February 14, 2010  
Transfiguration Sunday

One of the most studied themes of my ministry these days is transformation. Why? I get into a situation I can't handle or manage and I don't know what to do. I believe everybody gets stuck somehow, sometime. Maybe it's health, maybe it's a job or career problem, maybe it's a relationship problem, or some unresolved conflict. Maybe it is someone else in the family who is experiencing this. So how do I get unstuck and be a helpful influence in the midst of the sticky situation?

Maybe it's deeper than that: a secret addiction, a mental health problem, or possibly a deep fear or anxiety that won't go away. Where do I go with such a need? Those closest to me sometimes can't help me because they are so close to me and possibly a part of whatever is causing the difficulty in the first place.

So where can I go? Do I go to a stranger upon the suggestion of someone I know and trust? Do I go to a professional counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist? Where is my help and my community when I need it most?

I have suggested small groups as a way to regularly take care of many needs and difficulties. The way of the small group is a method Jesus himself used. But what is the key component in that small group experience?

Here's where I break away from our regularly scheduled programming and come to the Olympics. Much is made of this sporting event which seems to be one of the few positive, encouraging world venues for peaceful competition. Much is also made of the amount of time each individual athlete puts into their training. Much has also been made of the amount of money and resources being poured into making sure the Canadian athletes have the competitive edge, the best medicine, the best technology, the best psychology, the best overall training tools. Whole lives are being poured into these fairly specific winter sports.

I suppose that's where we get the phrase that something has an Olympic quality or magnitude. It is the ultimate in long term training for a two minute long race, or even just a few seconds of jumping or free style. Years

and years of planning goes into these individual sports. And similarly in the team sports, years of individual's lives are devoted to these particular athletic challenges. The Olympics celebrates the far reaches of the human spirit and body to achieve more. Sometimes these sports push too far and end in tragic accidents or even death, such as with the young 21 year old Georgian man who lost his life on the luge track, during practice on Friday. There is a risk in pushing the envelope in sports, particularly where individuals are travelling at speeds exceeding highway speeds, except not having a car around you to protect you.

The Olympics represent a model of years of practice, training and expert coaching to get to the height of a particular sport and individual conditioning. In small groups, or at any time one attempts to be vulnerable about one's needs or desires, we bring our whole lives to the table, and focus on that one area of need. We bring ourselves to the group or individual. As we seek to share ourselves with another human being, we wonder if that experience will be a wipe out or even a death, or possibly a medal or high placement, if we share who we truly are. What will that person think of me? What we are looking for is a place and a venue for being loved.

Small groups and professional individuals may not have the answers to our burning questions in life. But they can help us find a way to cope, to go on, to deal with what we are dealing with in a constructive way. So while we may not ever experience sport in the way the Olympians do, we can experience an Olympian love. What I mean by "Olympian love" is the kind of love we have in Jesus, the kind of love available to us in God and in God's people, the kind of love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13, kind, patient, not keeping score of wrongs, not boastful or proud, not easily angered, trusts and hopes and perseveres.

The plan of God becoming a human being to save us from the situation of our being unable to rescue ourselves from sin and rebellion was centuries, perhaps millennia in the making, probably longer. Individual athletes only have their young life times to train. But God had more time to consider such a great sacrificial love for each one of us. He gave us everything he could in coming to minister to us for a short while so long ago, and then to be with us by the Holy Spirit, if we choose to trust him.

God's love is Olympic. We have at his table today the reminders of all that Jesus did to be able to care for us, each one of us, no matter what we are

going through, no matter how difficult life is, no matter what challenge or issue faces us.

The Scriptures today tell us of how Moses met with the Lord and how his face was physically changed as a result. He was glowing. In order to not scare or flaunt this new physical look, he wore a mask, a veil. Paul tells us that he put the mask on to hide the fact that the glow that came from the glory of the Lord was fading. He wasn't what he once was.

All of us put on masks of very kinds. Some of us wear professional masks. Some of us wear intellectual masks. Some of us wear spiritual masks. We try to cover up something, sometimes consciously, but most times unconsciously. But the Gospel calls us to just be who we are with all our flaws, and to acknowledge all our difficulties and sins. We need to do this because it is in this state of need, that God comes and transforms. If we don't need God, we tend to substitute our own choices for God, whether it be ourselves, our passions, our intellectual constructs, as our own little "g" gods or idols. But if we do actually need God, then God surprises us with the power of weakness and the strength of vulnerability.

This is how we are to come to the table of the Lord. All other ways tend to make our spirituality into a badge or add-on. Religion can be a recreational sport, but God calls us to consider our spiritual need and relationship with God as a core value.

On this Valentines Day, it is okay to admit how much we need to be loved, young or old, married or not, well to do or nothing to do, whatever stage or season of life we are in. This is the place. This is the time. Admit what you need and risk receiving what you desire. This is the transformational path.

The three closest friends of Jesus went on a mountain hike with him. At one point in their time together, Jesus begins to shine and become brighter than they could ever imagine, even shinier than Moses was after meeting with God and receiving the Ten Commandments. Paul tells us that we are being changed into the image of Jesus as we gaze upon him. Sometimes we look at Jesus in Bible Study, sometimes in prayer. But here at his table he looks at us with his eyes of love. Let us receive his look and his love.

Let us pray.