

## ***“Life-changing moments”***

**January 16, 2011**

***Text: Isaiah 49:1-7, John 1:29-42***

### I.

Of all the gospels, without doubt, the gospel of John is the most intense. It's peppered with dramatic moments that ask something of us. There are all sorts of ***life-changing moments***.

- With the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine;
- with Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to see Jesus at night with questions about the meaning of life;
- with the woman at the well, whose whole family became followers of Jesus;
- and with the lame man at the Sheep Gate pool, the feeding of the 5,000, and the healing of the man born blind ...

Indeed, all of the infectious and prompting *I AM's* of John's gospel ask something of us.

***I am the bread of life ... I am the light of the world ...***

Their intent is that we see the truth of what God has done for us in Jesus. In other words, that we see reaches of the love, the forgiveness, the unconditional welcome of all people.

***I am the good shepherd ... I am the vine and you are the branches ...  
I am the resurrection and the life ...***

Imagine being present when these claims are being announced! We'd be drawn in, wouldn't we? How could it be otherwise? Again, more than any other gospel, John asks something of us.

And then, from the reading I just shared with us: ***Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***

Just like that! Here he is; it's Jesus and he's coming toward them. After all they've heard and seen, it's a moment that grabs them and nudges them out of their routine. It's *the one who takes away the sin of the world.*

**Life-changing moments ...**

### II.

Doesn't it seem like every time we're going about the business of living our lives ... into our daily routines ... meeting our commitments ... doing what we do ... enjoying our

share of good times with family and friends that—suddenly—out of the blue, some horrific event bursts into our world, shattering our bubble of calm and bell being?

The awful, violent shooting rampage that took place a week-ago yesterday in Arizona was such an event. Like you, no doubt, I was caught totally off guard.

It was what seemed to be a peaceful, community-based, civic event—on a Saturday morning in Tucson outside a supermarket. The organizer of the event, U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords (who was shot, seriously wounded and is still fighting for her life) called it: ***Congress on Your Corner***.

It was just the kind of civic event our democracy seeks to be about: come and meet your congresswoman ... hear what she has to say about the issues that matter to you ... come and be engaged and live out your civic responsibility. It was all good, and then ...

### III.

And then a demented shooter, a man with *who-knows-what* demons tormenting his spirit, unleashes a fury of violence leaving 6 dead and 13 wounded before he was subdued and marshaled off to the abyss of whatever senseless fate.

And in his wake, a numbing cloud of darkness, sorrow and heart-wrenching pain. And always the questions that linger: what does it mean? What do we do?

Its meanings, of course, are deep, complex and multi-layered and take time to sort out. And what can we do but try and learn from it and do better. However painfully, these events offer **life-changing moments** for personal insight and growth.

To begin with—as always—we come face to face with our mortality. In a series of mindless moments, Dorothy Morris, Dorwan Stoddard, Judge John Roll, Phyllis Schneck, Gabe Zimmerman and 9 year-old, Christian Taylor Green were killed—taken away forever from this world and from their families and friends.

Life is so fleeting ... so, here one day, gone the next. We say this all the time; but, still, it's true. We only have so much time, so many days—to sharpen our moral imagination about our values and our future, to listen more compassionately and caringly, and to be the best, most loving person we can be.

Reflections on our mortality compel us to recognize what we already know, if we think about it—that our lives are not about wealth, status, power or fame ... but, rather, *how well we have loved*. President Obama used those very words in his moving speech this past Wednesday evening.

#### IV.

It would be easy to have a knee-jerk reaction to this sort of tragedy—particularly with regard to gun laws but also with regard to the nature and tone of public discourse in recent times.

We must aim higher. And we must expect and demand something better.

In this light, there is something about little, nine year-old Christina Taylor Green that grabs me.

Perhaps it's because she makes me think about my children—my two girls—when they were that age ... how much we loved them ...

- and how we saw ourselves and our future in and through them ...
- the high hopes we had for them ... the abundant promise we saw in them—our little girls, with a whole lifetime before them.

And now with our little granddaughter ... all the innocence and curiosity ... so instantly trusting ... the eagerness of spirit ... the contagious energy and laughter ... the evolving personality and manner. It just draws you in. It makes you happy and fills you with joy.

And I think: little Christina was like that to her parents and family. In her, we see our children and grandchildren.

And, again, I think: the reality that she represented ... the innocence, the lack of cynicism, the hope. You can't kill that. Always, that lives on ...

You can't kill the hope; you can't kill the dream—of a more perfect union, of a deeper, more loving glimpse into God's redemptive ways.

Friends, when our loved ones die, their deaths have meaning in and through what we choose to do with the rest of our lives. Out of the pain the grief—that at times seems to have no end—their dying makes each one of us want to do good.

It makes us want to love more deeply and more inclusively and to care more compassionately. It makes us want to act more responsibly and to rise toward the mountain top of goodness to which God calls us.

#### V.

As we reflect on all of this this morning, our reading from John's gospel offers a note of encouragement. I say *encouragement* because the gospel of John is about ***life-changing moments***. These *life-changing moments*, of course, center around Jesus: getting to know him, growing to a larger sense of what he is about—which has to do with a BIG love and a BIG forgiveness and their implications for believers and for the world.

The author of John's gospel wants so deeply, so passionately, for people to believe. For him—always—*time is of the essence*. In other words, we don't have forever and certainly not all day.

Therefore, every hour and every moment, even, bear *life-changing* possibilities.

These *life-changing moments* are like wings of the eternal come to give us a fuller glimpse of God's truth.

Incomprehensibly and paradoxically, perhaps, the deaths of little Christina and the others in this horrific tragedy are, for us, like winds of the eternal come to take us to a deeper glimpse of God's purposes.

The tragic in life, beyond saddening us unspeakably, functions like a wake-up call, a potentially **life-changing moment**.

Like the response of John the Baptist, in our reading—upon seeing Jesus in the early part of John's gospel:

***Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*** Imagine that! The sin of the world. That's no small thing.

## VI.

And so, friends, in the midst of all the concern over the economy; in the grip of all the blame and finger-pointing over the status quo in our country, all that worries us with how polarized and divided we've become as a nation; how our national discourse, at times, seems outside the realm of civility and common decency, the spirit of a little girl invites us to higher ground.

**Life-changing moments!** Are we awake? Are we paying attention? Because ***here comes the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.***

As President Obama noted in his speech, here was a little girl (nine years old, born on September 11, 2001) who was—amazingly, at her young age—becoming aware of our democracy ... just beginning to understand the meaning of *citizenship* ... and just beginning to glimpse how she, too, someday, might be a part of it.

She'd been elected to her Student Council ... and, now, she was off to meet her congresswoman, whom she was looking forward to seeing and meeting. Again, all of this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by cynicism.

1. Is it not possible, through all of this, that we—all of us, on all sides—might be moved to live up to her expectations?

2. Is it not possible that we might be moved ourselves to want and work for an America that's as good as she imagined it?

What this is all about, friends, is giving ourselves to the Spirit and to God's purposes and to the **life-changing moments** that come our way. Moments that, if we allow them, if we open ourselves to them, can change our lives and lift us closer to the spiritual high ground of God's ways.

Together, we must be able to imagine and live toward a better tomorrow. Toward a world where compassion and love define the moment. And so, at the end of the day, what are we to do?

- We are to treat everyone with kindness and compassion, for starters, and be patient and tolerant of our individual differences. That's America at its best.
- And then, trust the love. Trust the love ... because it's in *trusting the love* that we rise above the sin of the world.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**