

In this Jan. 10, 2020 photo, Genette Hofmann holds her cat Dottie in her home in Burlington, Wash., a few days before undergoing brain surgery in Seattle in hopes of reducing the epileptic seizures that had disrupted her life for 3 decades. At the same time, Hofmann agreed to donate a small bit of her healthy brain tissue to researchers, who were eager to study brain cells while they are still alive, joining a long line of epilepsy patients who've helped scientists reveal basic secrets of the brain.

Many years ago we lived up the street from the Welton family. They also became a part of the congregation we served in North Bay. Over the time we knew them, they had four children-three girls and one boy. We saw the development of the two younger children in particular, right from the beginning. Each of the children suffered to different degrees from epileptic seizures. Lindsay seemed to be doing just fine, developing as one would expect until she reached the age of 2. At that time she began to experience regular seizures and so she was put on a drug regimen. This active, energetic little girl who would come down the street and swing on the swings in our backyard, became unable to walk without staggering.

One day the children's mom, Joanne wanted to go out to do some errands for an hour or so. Her sister was just a bit late in arriving, so I said I could watch over the younger two children for an hour. I was instructed what to do if the youngest, Brock had a seizure. Lie him down in a prone position. Give him some medication through a suppository. I was assured that this wasn't likely to happen and a seizure wouldn't last long if he had one.

Well, Joanne's sister had just arrived, when 5 minutes later, Brock had a seizure. Thankfully, I wasn't the only adult present. We dealt with the situation and he was fine. When his mother, who happens to be a nurse returned, she was just as concerned for me as she was for her son. She knew what a shock it can be to be placed in that situation of needing to respond and take responsibility for another's life.

I was fine, though the experience was a bit unnerving. I went home that day, thanked the Lord for my healthy children and hugged them especially hard that night. It was an experience that opened my eyes. It was a kind of transfiguration- I had a greater appreciation for those who care for children with special needs. About three years later, the Welton's oldest child, Sarah, died in her sleep at age 11, due to a seizure. Sarah did not have 30 years of complications like Genette Hoffman, but she did not have anything like a normal childhood either. I pray that research into epilepsy will allow other children to be saved from a life harmed by the side effects of multiple seizures on any given day.

Today is the last Sunday before Lent begins. Traditionally the gospel text for this Sunday is that of the Transfiguration. I've always wondered about Jesus taking his friends, Peter, James and John up the mountain. Did he climb the mountain to this strange and awesome encounter for himself or for their sake? German theologian, Helmut Thielicke was active in the Nazi resistance movement, did lecture tours during the second world war through an underground network and after the war did what he could to revive Germany's academic and spiritual heritage. Thielicke was fond of saying that he thought nothing actually happened to Jesus on that mountain. What took place, he felt, was the opening of the eyes of the three disciples to see Jesus as he really was---a

glory that of necessity had to remain hidden, because human eyes could not bear it to be always revealed. Of course, we do not know, and this thought of Thielicke does not in any way detract from the mystery of the moment.

The transfiguration is more about mystery than any kind of logic.

A large family with roots in the Huttonville/nw. Brampton area make a regular trek to the Dominican Republic. Over the years they made connections in the hill country. For a couple of days out of their vacation they would visit the schools there, delivering the books and clothing they had packed away throughout the year. Their neighbours, friends, and family all contribute toward this effort. On the last trip a granddaughter, Sabrina, seven years of age went along. On the day they visited the school, the youngster wore her favourite t-shirt, one that had 'Dorothy' of Oz emblazoned on the front. She had begged and pleaded with her grandmother to get that t-shirt. Now all the school children joined in playing soccer with the ball Sabrina's family had brought along.

Her grandmother was at some distance, but she noticed Sabrina taking off her t-shirt and exchanging it for the one worn by another girl. When Sabrina was back within 'earshot' the grandmother said, "Are you sure you want to give up your favourite t-shirt to that girl. You don't have that many good things with you to wear." Sabrina replied, "Oh, it's ok, grandma. I could see that she really wanted it. It made her so happy when I gave it to her." The incident is burned in the grandmother's mind. It was an experience of transfiguration to see her granddaughter give away one of her favourite things.

High in the rarified air of that mountain, the disciples saw Jesus, along with renowned figures of the past, conversing. For the three disciples, the revelation places Jesus in succession of those great messengers of God that they would have learned about when they were children. Peter is so overcome by it all, that he starts to babble. He offers to build three shrines then and there. He wants to hold onto this moment----and to make it last-just as there are moments in our lives when we do not wish to let go. Sometimes we don't want our understanding to change. Sometimes we do not want to let go. But Peter, like us, finds that he must let go. Even as he makes his offer, the figures are gone, and in Peter's mind explodes the absolute certainty that his Lord is indeed the Son, the Beloved of God.

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I take delight; listen to him."

On the way down the mountain Jesus instructs them not to mention his transfiguration until after his Resurrection. It seems as if they respected his wishes and remained silent. But I suspect they couldn't think of much else for days to come. Like when you stare at the sun for even a moment, and for a long time afterward, when you close your eyes or look at something else, the imprint of that dazzling sun is still before your mind's eye. These three onlookers/babblers, keeping this event before their mind's eye, have their identity transformed by their relationship with Jesus into leaders and courageous martyrs.

Writer, Herbert O'Driscoll invites us to examine our own experience for moments of transfiguration, when our knowledge of something, our attitude to something or somebody, our relationship to Christian faith, is transfigured in a moment of unexpected insight.

The last point on my journey I'd like to share took place 9 years ago. My father and I visited the doctor of internal medicine who was caring for my mother in hospital.

The doctor had ordered some more tests and would meet with us and my mother the next day to give a prognosis. She subtly warned us that what she suspected the results would be, was not good news.

The next day the doctor had more information, which confirmed her expectation. There was a mass of cancer on my mother's pancreas and in to her stomach. There was the possibility of a procedure which might bring some relief but it might not and it was all a matter of a month or two at the most. Mother's response was almost immediate. Well I wanted to reach 80 years and I did. Through tears she said, "it's ok, I know I am going to heaven."

When I recall that day of dread, those words are burned in to my consciousness, "I know I am going to heaven. I know I am going to be with God."

Let us take up our Lord's invitation for the journey, to take up the climb of the mountain. We are privileged to walk this journey together as a community of faith. Sharing our joys and our sorrows. This morning we look at the past year together and we consider the path of the immediate future. Pay attention to moments of insight, places of our eyes being opened, experiences of having our hearts turned inside out, assurances that will last a lifetime. On our return down the mountain we will find that we are never quite the same again. Thanks be to God!

Acknowledging inspiration from:

O'Driscoll, Herbert, The Word Among Us, Year A, Volume 1