

*I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,  
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more.  
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,  
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I,  
Love lifted me; love lifted me,  
when nothing else could help, love lifted me.*



## *A Message from Mark!* **Which way is up?**

**14 February 2010 - Transfiguration**  
**Scripture: Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36**

Victor Frankl wrote of his experiences in Man's Search for Meaning. Some of his fellow prisoners in the Nazi concentration camp, Dachau, yearned so desperately for their freedom, but had been held captive so long, that when they eventually were released, *"they walked out into the sunlight, blinked nervously, and then silently walked back into the familiar darkness of the prisons, to which they had been accustomed for such a long time."*

When the upward climb isn't taken, or won't be taken, it may lose its pulling power after a while. When God invites us up the mountain as he did Moses, and as Jesus invited three of his disciples, we dare not pass up the invitation. We celebrate today with Dashiell, Alana & Nerida their response to this precious invitation and pray for your ongoing journey.

If we are held back by fear, by hatred, by cruelty, by poverty, by need, or if we choose to be pulled down by appetites, addictions, attitudes and associations, after a while the upward invitation will no longer be heard, the light from above will not be seen or appreciated, and we'll choose the darkness, just as did the prisoners in the concentration camp.

The transfiguration story recounts what we might call an "epiphany" in which the veil between the visible and invisible worlds is momentarily drawn back, and Jesus is revealed in his true light. Christ's final authority dominates the story as its theme. *"This is my Son, my Chosen, Listen to him"*, verse 35 commands. The account puts Jesus in the company of two supreme authority figures, only to have them vanish so completely that the awed disciples *"saw no one but Jesus only"*.

Like us, who, having glanced at the sun, see its after-image emblazoned on all we then look at, the disciples see every experience - every issue - in terms of Jesus Christ. So, we pray, may we.

**AMEN!! THANKS BE TO GOD!!**

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Up and down - two simple words. Alongside direction, up and down indicate qualitative differences of emotion. When we feel good, we feel up; when we feel down, we feel bad. Slang uses, such as uppers and downers describe causes, chemical and existential, for opposite emotional states. Up and down also carry positive and negative meanings in daily living. When we are well thought of, we rise in social standing; when a bad reputation pursues us, we go down in popularity. When the 'all ordinaries' goes up, that is considered good; when it falls, it is bad. When sales go up, a company prospers; when orders go down, the company declines. When a student receives good marks in school, grades go up; when results are not so good, the grades go down. As the Uni student said to his parents, *"Christopher Columbus and I have something in common - we both went down in history."*

For a lot of people, up and down carry theological implications as well. Up is often seen to be God's domain and down, the Devil's. We hear folk say heaven is up there, hell is down somewhere. The Bible portrays this up and down image throughout its pages based on what we now call "a three-tiered universe" world view. (Remember the best minds of the time understood the world as being flat with Heaven up there somewhere, Earth here and Hell down below)

There are two such pictures in this week's readings. We have Moses with face aglow, returning to his people with the commandments tucked under his arm. This story places the holy event of revelation up on Mount Sinai. Another mountain-top experience is presented in the gospel, the Transfiguration of Jesus, a figurative lofty spiritual experience taking place on a literal high spot.

So up is good in the Bible. God spoke and made covenants from the mountain top. The Hebrew people made sacrifices and worshipped God there. Sanctuaries were established on various mountains, e.g. on Bethel, on Ebal and Gerizim and Shiloh, and of course on Mount Sinai. Mountains played a significant role in Jesus' ministry. Not only did he mention them in striking illustrations, e.g. a city set on a hill cannot be hid, and faith can move mountains, but also he used them as a place to be alone, to pray, or to teach his disciples privately. And, of course, the Transfiguration in this week's reading, occurred on a high mountain, perhaps Hermon. And finally, the Ascension apparently took place on the Mount of Olives.

This is significant spiritual imagery for us to this day. We believe we were meant to rise, to be uplifted, to soar on eagles wings, to ascend to the highest and best. Up is the way to go. God calls us to the heights. We lift up our eyes to the hills. Love lifts us up where we belong.

When we lived in England, by this time of year after a long cold winter, you're desperately looking towards the coming spring. I found it an especially helpful seasonal parallel to the gospel story. In our UK mail this week we heard that life has started to rise already as a result of the mild winter. Snowdrops are coming up in parks and gardens. The dark, cold earth surrenders its grip once more and life begins to ascend from its wintry grave.

We don't have that seasonal prompt just now, but we still look toward Lent and Easter as a time for us to grow spiritually, to rise to the heights, to accept the invitation of the Lord, as Moses did, to come up on the mountain and be renewed and uplifted.

To that end, and since we don't have an Education Cluster to oversee such matters, I've taken it upon myself to offer you a five week DIY Lenten Study guide called 'Water for the Journey'. If you could use the helpful discipline of such a resource, either on your own or preferably with friends, please help yourself to a copy on the cabinet and let me know how you get on.

Here's a beautiful true story related by Paul Gorman in his book [How Can I Help?](#) which illustrates this message today.

*"I was diving in about 40 feet of water, alone. I knew I should not have gone alone, but I was very competent and just took a chance. There was not much current, and the water was so warm and clear and enticing. But when I got a cramp, I realised at once how foolish I was. I was not very alarmed, but was completely doubled up with stomach cramp. I tried to remove my weight belt but I was so doubled up I could not get to the catch. I was sinking and began to feel more frightened, unable to move. I could see my watch and knew that there was only a little more time on the tank before I would be finished with breathing. I tried to massage my abdomen. I wasn't wearing a wet suit, but couldn't straighten out and couldn't get to the cramped muscles with my hands.*

*I thought. **"I can't go on like this. I have things to do."** I just couldn't die anonymously this way, with no one to even know what happened to me. I called out in my mind, **"Somebody, something, help me!"***

*I was not prepared for what happened. Suddenly I felt a prodding from behind me under the armpit. I thought, "Oh, no sharks". I felt real terror and despair. But my arm was being lifted forcibly. Around into my field of vision came an eye - the most marvellous eye I could ever imagine. I swear it was smiling. It was the eye of a big dolphin. Looking into that eye, I knew I was safe.*

*It moved forward nudging under me, and hooked its dorsal fin under my armpit with my arm over its back. I relaxed hugging it, flooded with relief. I felt that the animal was conveying security to me, that it was healing me as well as lifting me toward the surface. My stomach cramp went away as we ascended and I relaxed with security, but I felt strongly that it healed me too. At the surface it drew me all the way into the shore. It took me into water so shallow that I began to be concerned for it, that it would be beached, and I pushed it back a little deeper, where it waited, watching me, I guess to see if I was all right - it made sure I was safe in the shallowest water. Then the dolphin turned sideways- made just one sound and went back out to join the others."*

This story has all the elements of salvation - helplessness, desperation, a sinking into sure death, a prayer for help, then, rescue - and with it uplift, healing, relief, safety, and everlasting gratitude. It brings to mind a very old salvation hymn: