

Column

A place of death has become a place of life. This thought goes through my head every time I pass a certain house on my way to church.

Once it was not uncommon to see drug taskforce men, often accompanied by a K-9 unit, surrounding the house. When they were not there, a man with a large protruding abdomen sporting a sleeveless tee-shirt, always with a brown quart beer bottle in his hand, would be out front. Often, he would be leaning into a stopped car. One can only imagine what was being operated out of that house. It was truly a place of squalor and a haunt of wretchedness.

Now all that has changed, instead of drug dogs and law enforcement personnel, there are flowers and shrubs and large landscaping rocks surrounding the residence. The structure itself has been gutted and renewed, with a garage added. Other than being painted a rather disagreeable black, it is a delight to behold, especially when one remembers what it once looked like. A place of death has become a place of

life. Hopefully, the family who occupies it will find it a place of joy and peace, a haven of blessing.

Transformations such as I have just described are impressive, but there are others of an even greater magnitude which merits our attention. Think about the cross and hill on which Jesus died. The cross was an instrument of torture and shame. The hill, a place of death. Post-Easter both have been transformed and infused with life.

People now wear crosses around their necks, have them tattooed on their bodies, hang them from their rear-view mirrors and place them on church spires. The hill on which Jesus died has likewise been transformed. Instead of being a place of shame and horror, it is sung about and revered, as in George Bennard's 1913 hymn, which opens with the words:

“On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame; and I love that
old cross where the dearest and best for a world of
lost sinners was slain.”

Most dramatic of all -- beyond houses, objects and a site outside Jerusalem -- are the transformed lives of men and women who have had an earth-shaking encounter with the One who hung and died on the cross of calvary.

A man I have met and count as a friend comes to mind; his name, Thomas Tarrents. In his book "Consumed by Hate, Redeemed by Love," Tarrents chronicles his transformation from a Klan terrorist to one consumed by the love of God for all people.

The transformation of a derelict house, as dramatic as it may be, pales in comparison to transformed lives. How can anyone doubt the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus when resurrections as the one that took place in the life of Thomas Tarrants are still happening?

The good news is that it can happen to the alcoholic, the drug dealer, the near-suicide . . . it can happen to you! Because Christ is risen, places of death can become places of life; people as good as dead can live.

O GOD, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity)

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