

**SERMON AT NORTH MIDLANDS: 6/8/95: GEOFF CHADWICK: Lk 9:28-36: "THE  
TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS"**

There is an irony of history on the 6th of August. The day we celebrate Jesus' Transfiguration marks a day of the transfiguration of history.

At 8:15am on this day exactly 50 years ago in 1945, an American B-25 Super-Fortress bomber known as the Enola Gay flew over the Japanese city of Hiroshima and dropped a bomb known as "Little boy" from 30 000 feet. This bomb, the first Atomic bomb to be exploded on a living population, had the equivalent force of 20 000 tonnes of TNT and exploded almost directly over the city's Industrial Promotion Hall. The ruins of this building still stand in Hiroshima as a memorial to that day.

When the bomb exploded, first there was a blinding flash, followed by intense heat and then a firestorm. Of the city's 245 000 inhabitants, 80 000 were killed by the initial blast. Within a year 140 000 had died, mostly from radiation sickness, cancers and severe burns. Shadows of passers-by were burnt into the roads, few buildings survived (apart from some that were earthquake proof), and most inflammables (including clothes) burnt. Surviving pregnant women within 3km of the epicentre had miscarriages, or premature infants who soon died. Those directly under the explosion had their bodies charred black and died within minutes. Those further out who may have survived the heat suffered severe radiation sickness. Even today, some survivors suffer the ill-effects of radiation.

Adding to the destruction was the fact that emergency services were wiped-out. Emergency workers fled the scene in fear and it took a month before debris could be cleared and the dead could be cremated.

Such was the terror of "the bomb" on Hiroshima.

Before the bomb was exploded, Hiroshima was an industrial centre, from which much of Japan's military hardware was produced. It was a living city - even though it was a city of war - and in the space of a split second it was reduced to a dead city. Today it is a city of Peace.

Hiroshima, today, is a Mecca to peace lovers. The area around the Industrial Promotion Hall has been made into *Heiwa-koen* - Peace Park, with a tranquil canal and gardens. From the Hall dome there is a walk to the Peace Memorial Museum. The purpose of this museum is to show the effects of the bomb on Hiroshima, and to serve as a warning to leaders of the horrors of such weapons. Films are shown at the museum, and I am told that visitors leave in a very sombre, yet necessary state.

Hiroshima is a place of transfiguration.

A city of war transfigured into a city of peace.

A city of destruction transfigured into a city of re-construction.

A city of death transfigured into a city of life.

But the dropping of the A bomb on Hiroshima transfigured more than that city. It transfigured history and it transfigured people.

The Transfiguration of History: The A-bomb ended the "Hot War" but gave rise to the "Cold War". Fear through a balance of power stopped the use of such terrible weapons but not their manufacture. Peace between the East and West came at a price - fear and mis-trust. The world would never be the same because we now had the potential to destroy all life on the planet. Such a prospect calls for a transfiguration of the heart. With the risk of transfiguring our planet into a wasteland, we've had to transfigure the way we talk to each other. Negotiation and peace talks are a way of life.

But the transfiguration is not complete. The part within us "Which makes for war" continues to be active. Wars still abound. Transfiguration is still necessary. We like the prophet Micah still await the time when we can say:

...they shall beat their swords into ploughshears, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them again (Micah 3: 33, NRSV).

The Transformation of People: Many of the scientists who worked on the "Manhattan Project" to develop the Atomic bomb and saw that it was "beautiful science", came to realise the horror of what they had invented. Albert Einstein, in particular, was deeply concerned that the discoveries of nuclear physics could be used for such horrific purposes. Einstein underwent a transfiguration. Having seen the destructiveness of the bomb, he worked conscientiously after the war to promote a policy of "Atoms for peace". His desire, along with others, was that bombs should not be built.

I understand also, that after the test explosion of the first atomic bomb in the desert of Los Alamos, some advisers who had worked tirelessly to develop the bomb, suggested to the President that the bomb be demonstrated to the enemy rather than used in a surprise attack. In the end (and the pros and cons can be debated many ways) a military decision was made to drop the bomb as a surprise attack.

But there was transfiguration in the hearts of many who had worked on the bomb. Oppenheimer, who had led the Manhattan project, worked diligently for the formation of an *International* atomic development authority. There was also controversy over the development of the Atomic Energy Commission - debate centred on whether it be a civilian or military organization - but when it was set up it was pre-dominantly civilian.

Our Own Transfiguration: Now this may all sound like an interesting history lesson. What has it got to do with us now?

Well we all need to undergo transfiguration from time to time. When was the last time you built an atomic bomb in your heart? Is it still being built? Do you plan to demonstrate it to the enemy or let it off in one destructive surprise attack?

Are you able to change your mind? Can the knowledge you've learnt from building your bomb be put to peaceful purposes? Can a bomb builder become a peace negotiator?

And what about cities of war? Can they become cities of peace? Hiroshima has, but only after a most terrible event. Can we transfigure the cities of war in our hearts? My hope

is yes. But I hope it is without the need for terrible destruction. Nevertheless, transfiguration into something better can be terrifying. Between Maundy Thursday and Easter Day there is the horror of Good Friday.

Jesus is our peace because he has known our warfare and has transfigured it. May Jesus be our peace. May we be each other's peace and may we be people of transfiguration.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**