When did Jesus happen to you?

This week as I looked through photos taken on a holiday some years ago, I came across several from a visit to the waterslides at Glenelg, a beach-side suburb of Adelaide. I remember queuing up with my son Thomas, then five years old, for the biggest, fastest, scariest waterslide and him turning to me with a grin and saying, “It’s like waiting for the special bread at church on Sunday!”

I don’t know about you but I can’t remember the last time I was filled with that sort of excited anticipation waiting for Holy Communion, and yet surely this is what the Eucharist should evoke in us. The Episcopal priest Sara Miles remembers her first Communion well. A committed atheist, she walked into a church one day, more out of curiosity than anything else. She walked in and found a chair:

“We sat down and stood up, sang and sat down, waited and listened and stood up and sang, and it was all peaceful and fairly interesting.”

Then came the invitation to communion and Sara followed everyone else and then, “Someone was putting a piece of fresh, crumbly bread in my hands, saying ‘The body of Christ’, and handing me the goblet of sweet wine, saying ‘The blood of Christ’, and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me.”

I wonder if you can remember when “Jesus happened” to you?

When I prepare people for marriage, I always ask them to tell me the story of how they fell in love. What was that first spark like? When was the moment that they ‘knew’? And, I tell them how important it is to remember that story and to occasionally get it out and dust it off and re-visit it because it is good to remember.

I wonder if you can remember when “Jesus happened” to you?
What was it, or who was it, that first captivated you about the faith, or the scriptures, or Jesus of Nazareth? And, when did that captivation, with its accompanying excitement or awe, possibly fade into habit or chore or duty?

The late Rabbi Abraham Heschel once wrote:

“Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement…get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted…never treat life casually.”

Is this what it means to ‘never take life casually’? Thomas Greaves enjoys the thrill of a waterslide at Glenelg in South Australia in January 2017.

“Live life in radical amazement” might be too big a step. So, perhaps, a first step on the way back to amazement might be gratitude. We could start by giving thanks. We could start by naming before Jesus all those things we know to be 'gifts' in our lives...like the memory of a small boy almost trembling in anticipation and excitement about a waterslide ride with his dad.

This week that little five year old, so full of excitement, turned 15. Some of the childlike excitement is gone, but his passion for life is undiminished and while he would probably use different language, I have no doubt that Jesus is still “happening” to him.

Editor’s note 23/03/2021: The YouTube video link of a young Thomas Greaves was added to this post since publication.

Sunday Devotions • Sunday 21 March 2021 • By Daniel Aspinall

Sunday Devotion: 28 March 2021, Sixth Sunday in Lent

Not my will, but yours

Main readings: Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-18; Philippians 2.5-11; Mark 14.1-15.27 or Mark 15.1-39 (40-47)

Supplementary Readings: Psalm 70; Galatians 3.10-14; Exodus 13.1-3, 7-9; Psalm 118.1-16; John 12.20-32

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2.5)

At different stages of life, I've joined various teams; some formal (like a club basketball team) and some less so (like at pub trivia nights). More recently, the term ‘team’ has come to include colleagues in my professional life. In each team situation, the things I'm called on to undertake differ.

Paul encourages us to put others ahead of ourselves. When reading his exhortation to the Church in Philippi to imitate Christ's humility this Holy Week, we are reminded of the mindset of Christ as he entered Jerusalem. Anticipating what is to come, Christ makes no effort to evade it – praying “not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14.36) and remaining “obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross” (Philippians 2.8).

Rather than revealing an all-powerful, almighty God, the life of Christ – especially in Holy Week – reveals the humble and loving God who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Philippians 2.7), who demonstrates an explicit willingness to be human with us. Such humility should give us pause when we feel our desire to be the star player or to climb the corporate ladder creeping in.

How often do we let ourselves be driven by selfish ambition, however well disguised, or self-assertion, however subtly exerted, or conceit, however privately cultivated? What would it mean for us to look humbly to the interests of others? May the same mind be in each of us that was in Christ Jesus.