

You are the light of the world

Things happen in one's life that are never forgotten; even things that seem minor but are more significant than we think. It was 1942. By summer LaSalle College in my hometown was empty of students. They had all gone to war along with the faculty. Of us high school students on campus the seniors and juniors were into accelerated programs so that they might go off to the training camps earlier than scheduled.

Also in my city neighborhood the older boys that used to hang out on the street corners were gone. They were unlike the youth of postmodern times. Simpler, pitching pennies, hanging loose, dancing to Glenn Miller – and dependable. If I lost a ball down a street sewer, they would take off the sewer lid, hold me by my heels, lower me down toward the water to retrieve it, then lift me back – and I never worried about being dropped. Well, they too were gone off to Europe and the Pacific – and – if I may add - there was something about them that never shook our confidence that we would win the war. No doubt about it. Brokaw called them the greatest generation.

But now in the absence of those older fellows we younger kids had some vacancies to fill. Prematurely in summer we laid aside our childhood and obtained work papers – I to caddy at a country club at age 14. I view it as a moment of significance because it meant stepping out of my protective domestic, scholastic world into the rough and ready of employment, the vulnerability that goes with competition.

And indeed there were at least twenty other young teens gathered in the caddy area below the caddy shack. As golfers arrived to play, the caddy master surveyed the caddies below him and would call Joe or Bill . . . faces he recognized – a kind of favoritism that made me feel invisible. But then it wasn't long before he looked directly at me and said come up! *I now had a face* he recognized, my guarantee to future assignments. And also: a chance to earn \$1.00 per 18 hole round plus a 25-cent tip. In those days that would buy 12.5 ice cream sodas or 20+ lead soldiers to add to your collection, or ten movie matinees. Aside from such tastes, I was a mere child no more.

I also learned how to maneuver like an adult. On my first time around the course my golfer at mid fairway asked me what club to use to reach the green. He thought I must know something. I pointed to any old iron and said, "Try this one." And by golly he landed on the green! I may not have known anything yet about clubs but I was now learning how to survive, i.e. deceive – like an adult.

Why do I recall that experience so vividly? Because it was, like so many moments in one's life, a step from one status of being into another of wider, deeper, consciousness – a new world. Life is like that. Events often beyond our control (like a spouse's dementia) bring us to a threshold that invites us to get beyond where we are. We may turn our faces away from the caddy master's searching gaze, reluctant to change. And yet may it not have been something of Jesus in that caddy master's gaze demanding that I (and you) make our faces more recognizable, less featureless, summoning us to become the salt of the earth, a light to the world?

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