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## *The Super Bowl, Transfiguration, Blessing*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Last Sunday after the Epiphany**

*A voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased"*

I know the real question on everyone's mind this morning: Who's going to win the Super Bowl tonight?

Well, I've got the answer. I'll tell you who's going to win.

Warrick Dunn will win. In fact, he's already won. I know that Atlanta Falcon fans are disappointed that he is not playing in Jacksonville tonight; but, let me tell you, he's already won the Super Bowl.

His father died when he was young, and he helped his surviving mother raise five children, even while he was getting an education and playing football. Then, when he was in college, his mother died; and he was left to care for his siblings alone. He did, with flying colors.

Now an NFL star, he has started a foundation which gets single mothers back on their feet, and enables them to own and furnish homes. Warwick Dunn won the Walter Payton award last week, and I believe he also won the Super Bowl.

I'll tell you will win the Super Bowl. The family of Dan Snyder will win. Even though the NHL is not playing hockey this year, the family of Dan Snyder has sure won. Their son, Dan, was killed in a tragic automobile accident, tragic enough in its own right, but also tragic because their son's best friend, Dany Heatley was driving.

There was plenty of pressure, and civic sentiment, that Dany Heatley should be severely punished. But the family of the killed young man, the family of Dan Snyder, said no. They had mercy. They had forgiveness. They had a grace that goes beyond understanding. Their grace persuaded the judge, too, to have mercy. They have won the Super Bowl.

Most of us will never play in the real Super Bowl. Some of us, at five or six years old, thought we might play there one day. But most of us will never do exactly what our idols will do. We watch sports stars and sports teams and fantasize about what we might do in their situations, but we know we will never actually be in those situations.

Or will we? Actually, we are wrong about that. We are in situations like them all the time. We may well be in the positions of Warrick Dunn and family of Dan Snyder one day. We may well face need and suffering and tragic death. The graceful actions of these people is exemplary; they deserve the Super Bowl.

We may never actually see Jesus one day, either. We'll never get to walk with him in the hills of Galilee, or down a road in Jerusalem. We hear about Jesus all the time, or at least as often as we get to church. We imagine what it must have been like to watch him perform a miracle or heal a sick child.

But we think to ourselves, "I don't think I'll ever see the child of God."

Or will we? Actually, we are wrong about that, too. We have an opportunity to see a child of God all the time. We have an opportunity today.

We have an opportunity today when we set about to baptize these very young children in our midst. And we have an opportunity to look at someone and say, "Truly you are the child of God."

Try it. Look at a child, the children sitting next to you, and say this: "Truly you are a child of God."

Now, you children try it. Look at that grown-up person next to you and say, "Truly you are a child of God."

Something miraculous happens when we say those words. That person is transformed, transfigured for us. When we look at a baby in a certain way, that child is transformed. That child becomes the face of a child of God. Transfiguration occurs.

When we baptize these children, when we bless them, we will see something else in them. We will see the image of God. What a miracle that is!

I know they will still be little children. They will still cry -just like us. They will still be messy""just like us. Later, they will misbehave and act out -just like we did, and just like our parents did.

But they will be transformed by our blessing.

If you read only one book of fiction this year, read *Gilead*, by Marilynne Robinson. It is the beautiful story of a dying 76 year-old minister, writing words for his 7 year-old son. They are the words he wants his son to remember.

Early in the book, he says, "There is a reality in blessing, which I take baptism to be, primarily. It doesn't enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is a power in that" (page 23).

Then, when he is asking himself whether he ought to bless someone, someone about whom he has doubts, he reflects, "Transformations [quite] abrupt do occur in this life, and they occur onsought and unwaited. .The Lord is constant. Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it? (page 203, 245).

Well, we have the courage to see today. We have the courage to bless. And when we bless someone, when we speak good words to them, when we touch them with God's grace, they become transfigured. They become transfigured into the grace of a child of God.

"The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

AMEN.

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