During some downtime following Christmas, I watched my first full length episode of the TV show, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. Perhaps you’ve seen the program. There is this crew of highly photogenic and talented designers – backed up by a crew of thousand’s – who turn a run-down house into a dream home right out of *Architectural Digest* in just seven days. Along the way there is the suggestion that as the house undergoes an extreme makeover, so, too, does its owner.

Apparently the show follows a routine: A family with a truly heartbreaking story has a chance at a new life. They walk through the living room with the stars of the show as they tell bits and pieces of their lives to the millions watching on TV. From these little snippets, the interior design team puts together ideas for an incredible new home. This leads to an around-the-clock rehab job. The family meanwhile takes off on a vacation in a very warm climate.

The clock is ticking and each week there is a tense filled moment when it looks like the project has falling hopelessly behind schedule. “Let’s move it people,” the host Ty shouts with his raspy horse voice. But somehow it all gets done right on time. The family returns. All the neighbors gather and shout out, “Move that bus.” And the family has its first glimpse of their new home. They are in tears, breathless and speechless; a look of overwhelming gratitude and shock is cast on their faces. You can see them moving their lips, forming the words, “Oh my God.”

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* digs hard at our emotional heart strings; when the family comes back and sees the transformation of their home, you better have a box of Kleenex at hand. The show is also inspirational. It is amazing what happens when we can pull together to work miracles on behalf of people in need. And it makes us feel good about who we are and what we make of life.

And lastly, the show is not real. Well, yes, they do come and knock out some walls and put in a great Jacuzzi in the master bedroom suite. But the true reality is that redesigning your house doesn’t transform your life.

Changing life is one of the themes of the Season of Lent. We see this in our two readings this morning. In Genesis we see a change in God’s relationship with humankind and all of creation. The first chapters of the story of the flood are about judgment and punishment. The story begins with God’s dismay at the wickedness of the human beings and God vows to get rid of humanity and start over again. (Gen. 6:5-7) After the flood, however, we see a change in God’s character. God rejects the previous commitment to destroy the world and establishes a new covenant with Noah to never again destroy life. (Gen. 9:11) The result is a transformation of the relationship between God and the people, and a new, far more profound understanding of the grace and justice of God.

Turning to Mark, we read the first movements of the public ministry of Jesus. In very quick succession, we are told of his baptism, journey into the wilderness and ministry. When Jesus walked to the Jordan River to hear the preaching of John, he had no idea how much his life would be transformed by the visit. This is, no doubt, an example of *Extreme Makeover: Life Edition*. From that point on, everything would be different; his relationship with God and with his family and friends, and the salvation history of God with the people of God. Even Western Civilization itself would be changed by this movement of the Spirit in the life of Jesus beside the River Jordan.

Traditionally the 40 days of Lent are used as a time of reflection and repentance, correction and change. It gives time to all believers to review their lives and make the changes necessary to become more Christ-like. Lent is a time, as one author put it, to put things back in order.
For example; unlike the show, if we really want to change the direction of our life, we have to take responsibility for our own makeover. We don’t get to be sent away for a two week vacation in the Bahamas while someone else works on the necessary changes in our lives. No one comes and slaps some new wall paper on our selfishness. Instead, we come to realize what is wrong, and acknowledge or confess it. This is the first step toward transformation, taking responsibility for the hurt we may have caused, and work on making the appropriate changes. The real change in our life comes from within us.

In religious terms, this is called repentance and conversion. And this is the first thing Jesus preached: Mark tells us that Jesus called people to “repent and believe.” (Mark 1:15) The Greek word used here for repentance means “to turn around,” or “to change one’s mind.” It reflects an act of our will.

Perhaps we could call this the Extreme Makeover: Life Edition. When we take seriously our commitment to pursue the ways of God in our world, we discover that we cannot live life the same old way. A new pattern must evolve. We move from a self-centered existence to a neighbor-centered existence; from protecting my own personal interests to protecting the interests of others; from finding our comfort and security in the accumulation of material goods to being a good steward of the resources God has given to us for the service of God’s reign.

Change – to “turn around” our lives – comes first of all when we recognize our faults, errors and weakness, when we repent of our sin, and seek, with God’s help, the changes that are essential for our lives. And so we learn that in the necessary changes we need in our lives, we must take responsibility for what is to come.

Friday, I received an email from a member of the church who kindly and gently pointed out something I failed to do in my capacity as a pastor. As I said, he did it gently and with kindness, but he was absolutely right. I had failed to do something that was essential for a pastor to do. But the bigger problem is that it is something that I fail to do often; it is a regular shortcoming of my ministry. As a result it has greatly disappointed and hurt people. I have to take responsibility for my failure and work to change my practice.

But let me point out another place where the TV show is not real: What happens when the Ty and all the builders leave? How do you maintain the house? How do you deal with all the neighbors who want to borrow that Sharper Image shovel that was a gift from the show? How do you handle your higher tax value of your property if your other life conditions don’t improve as well?

In the life edition of Extreme Makeover, you recognize that the changes aren’t perfect or final. Like the new house, at some point the new paint in your life is going to peel. There will be set-backs and disappointments. The problems of life will still persist; the medical bills, a child who acts out in rebellion, a life’s partner who will make mistakes and cause you pain – and then there are always your own mistakes to contend with.

From the story of Jesus in the wilderness, we learn that being baptized and lead by the Spirit of God does not insulate us from the real struggles and temptations of life. Rather, our baptism and the presence of the Spirit with us prepare us for these encounters.

Mark tells us that Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. For a moment, put yourself in Jesus’ sandals. He had just come to the Jordan River to hear the evangelist extraordinaire. As Phyllis mentioned in her message a few weeks ago, his was just one more face in the crowd. But then something happened, something that had not happened with any of the people who had previously come to be baptized by John. A voice came out of the heavens and identified Jesus as God’s own.

Got to be one of the highlights of life, right? Right up there with hanging your name on a banner in Allen Fieldhouse. You would have to think that from that moment on, life would be pretty good. High flying. God’s on your side: No problems from this point on.

But what happened to Jesus? The Spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. This can’t be good. Tempted. Hungry. Frightened. Alone. An awful lot like us an awful lot of the time. Life doesn’t follow the perfect plan.

At the same time, however, we need to recognize that our baptism and the Spirit’s presence provide us with the resources to
move through and beyond the traumas, disappointments and set-backs of life. In the wilderness, Jesus was not alone. The angels waited on him through the 40 days.

In the *Home Edition*, Ty and his pals all leave and head on to another house changing project. But in the *Life Edition*, we are still surrounded by the presence of God. Jesus went into the wilderness following God’s pronouncement that he was God’s chosen. We go into life with the mark of God’s baptism indicating that we too are God’s own. In *Life Edition*, we are surrounded by a supportive community, our church family, who are there to encourage and support us, and to help us along the path of life’s journey.

At the end of the reading from Mark, Jesus says this is “good news.” It is good news because we learn that life change is possible. It is good news because we learn that we can move through the changes with the encouragement and support of the church community we are a part of. And it is good news because the presence of God is with us, giving us the wisdom, courage and strength to undertake an *Extreme Makeover: Life Edition*.

---

i Dianne Bargett, quoted in *Sermon Nuggets*, Lindsay Black, Lent 1B, 2009 at textweek.org

ii William Barclay, Mark,