

Sermon for 3.3.19 Exodus 34.29-35; Ps 99; 2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2; Luke 9.28-36

Today is the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

The event of the transfiguration is all three synoptic gospels and in Luke's version, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray taking with him 3 disciples Peter, James and John.

And it is there right before their very eyes that Jesus is transfigured. The light in his face became like the brightness of the sun and his clothes flashed like lightning.

Now when we seek to understand the meaning of this amazing event - it may help to note, that 6 days before his transfiguration, Jesus predicted and shared with his disciples for the first time the details of his passion and death that was soon to take place.

His time up the mountain away from the crowds may well therefore have been to seek divine sustenance to support what he knew was before him - his journey to the cross.

In relative terms I think many of us can identify with such closeness to a loved one when we are aware of what trials lie before us. How we seek out the loved one to be close to at these troubled times.

Karl Rayner, renowned 20th Century theologian understands the event of Jesus transfiguration in very personal terms. It is, he suggests, when Jesus is embraced by God who fills all the chambers of his soul with the blessedness of God's light and God's love and unity. And it is at this same time of light that other divine things take place for there appears with him Moses and Elijah, the great proclaimer of the law and the prophets. Jesus stands between them as a sign that the law and the prophets have their goal and their fulfilment; and then just as at Jesus baptism, the voice of the Father confirms here, too, that Jesus is God's very beloved son.¹

Such an understanding is one that describes the beauty of communion with God in which the revelation and glory of God becomes visible.

Rowan Williams sees the timing of the celebration of the transfiguration of Jesus, which is one week before the beginning of lent, as having the effect of framing the whole of lent between two parallel stories. At the beginning there is the story of Jesus going into a lonely mountainous place to pray, attended by his three closest friends, Peter James and John. Here Jesus enters into a mystery so great that his friends shrink from it and have not words for it...at the end of lent there is the story of Jesus going to pray alone in the garden of Gethsemane. In both of these stories Jesus prays alone; in both there is a revelation of the Father; in both his friends don't know how to respond – they either shrink in terror or fall asleep through grief.²

I think most of us can identify with the disciples in both stories – their lack of understanding-their shock – their grief perhaps at their own inadequacy in such amazing extraordinary circumstances. There is nothing ordinary about the events that they have witnessed. And when we keep in mind the extraordinary nature of these stories in our faith, we can better grasp what Paul is writing about to the struggling church of Corinth in the epistle today.

¹ <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2013/08/06/sermon-the-transfiguration-of-the-lord-by-karl-rahner/>
Accessed 27.2.19

² aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1622/sermon-at-canterbury-cathedral-morning-service
Accessed 27.2.19

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are not ordinary people, they are people of hope who have at the core of their existence God's holiness that reshapes and redefines everything. What counts above all, Paul writes, is that Christians live in the acceptance and dependence upon the truth that God's holiness touches their very lives through Jesus.

Paul reminds the Corinthians about their differentness as Christians and tells them that it is this very thing that keeps them restless and hope-filled and alive in the world, for the world.

"All of us", he writes "with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed in to the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the lord the spirit."

In this epistle, Paul calls us all to live out our faith, to claim the extraordinary, and perhaps this is a very good time in our church history to claim such a thing for today we too like the Corinthians belong to a struggling church.

It is at times such as these especially, that it is very good and, I believe, necessary to hear the stories about Jesus and the way of God's transformative holiness in him and be touched deeply by them. I believe, we are overwhelmingly blessed with what we have as the core of our faith. It has the power to sustain us throughout all times, because in the light of Christ we are led by the Spirit into growth, through a love that is very humble and homely, and a prayer life that is full of adoration and confidence.

As present day disciples of Jesus Christ, we have also been led up the mountain to be part of the Glory of God present at the transformation and it continues to be in us shining forth into the world.

Now when we come down from the mountain and into the deep valley of disharmony and disconnection that the world and the church is presently experiencing, we need to take time to be still and know that the unveiled beauty of God remains still in us, in this world and in the church.

For in Christ in the dark night of earthly hopelessness the light of God shines, and our human heart can find in God the same power which turns a dying on a cross into a victory and into the redemption of the world.

The Lord be with you.