

Sunday 14th February, 2021 - Last Sunday after Epiphany - Year B

2 Kings 2:1-12
Psalm 50:1-6
2 Corinthians 4:3-12
Mark 9:2-9

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

I need to begin today by correcting a little bug-bear that I hold onto (perhaps a little too tightly sometimes!!) - today is *not* the Feast of the Transfiguration. The Feast of the Transfiguration is observed in the church on the 6th August every year - a stand-alone feast day which remembers and commemorates the event recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and also referred to in Peter's Epistle.

Today is the Last Sunday after Epiphany. It just so happens that every year on the Last Sunday after Epiphany we read the Gospel account of the Transfiguration. But it is structured in our lectionary like this for one very good reason - to provide a link; a bridge, if you like, to span the season of Epiphany and the season which begins on Wednesday - Lent. It provides the final vivid moment of Epiphany, and is the point at which Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem, and for all that is to follow.

And so, today, just before we start the Lenten journey, the Gospel draws our attention to the **nature** of this Jesus who is about to set out on this final journey to Jerusalem. Who is Jesus?

In the imagery of the shining light of the transfiguration we see that Jesus is both human and divine, both fully ordinary and extraordinary. And most alarmingly and confusingly we see that the glory of God shines upon and from within the one who is to be given over to shameful death. This image of brilliant shining can be overpowering and under engaging. What is such a moment to do with us?

Like Peter we can get distracted and flustered by the brightness of the light and want to build a booth or home in the mystical realms. But the mystical moment by its nature does not last and Jesus and the disciples have to come down the mountain to a world both the same and changed forever. And so we too having glimpsed the nature of Jesus the Anointed one and seen the glory of God in his face must now bring that back into the everyday world of small and great loves, triumphs and woes, losses and death itself. So this is our task this morning - to glimpse the glory of God in Jesus and bring it into ordinary daily life.

We still, in the church today, hold onto this image by the language we use for baptism. At the time of baptism, as the Baptismal Candle is lit, I say: "God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And all the gathered faithful reply, "Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

But what might it actually mean for us to shine as a light in the world to the glory of God? I guess we can imagine in some small way the utter brilliance, the luminosity, the radiance of God. It's a brightness so great the Israelites believed that they could not look upon the face of God and survive. The glory and power of God is described in our Old Testament reading, as Elisha's request to have a double measure must be tested by seeing if he can maintain eye contact with the glory of God taking Elijah up. Pretty heavy stuff!

Perhaps we do experience something of this glory when we are moved by things in our lives - moved with emotion by a breathtaking landscape or a beautiful piece of music; somehow changed as we gaze at an Icon of Jesus, or our Lady; some find that this happens as they look upon the raised sacraments at the moment of remembrance in the Eucharist - how something deep and true in us sees more than the surface of what is before us.

In Ignatian Spirituality there is a particular practice which I find to be incredibly powerful in its simplicity. It involves sitting quietly, and imaginatively having God gaze upon you - to think about how our God, whom we describe as Creator, and as Love, might look upon you, the created and loved being. And as surely as we might be moved with love at the sight (or sound, or taste, or smell) of something so lovely, how God is also moved with that same love as *you* are the object of that gaze.

And although being truly seen might well stir up all sorts of emotions, both positive and negative, the transfiguration reminds us that we can be changed - that we can be seen by God as beloved and loved; that we can be transformed, from one degree of glory to another. And our transformation shall be into the creatures we have always been called to be, our truest selves, for this is the glory of our Creator God whose brilliance caused the world to come into being, and who continues to call us into our created fullness.

And as we are transformed so we become lit up in a way that is a source of light for others. For in our baptism we are called into a faith community and this process of transformation is not an isolated one. As we grow into our fullness in the likeness of Christ we contribute to the fulfilment of creation itself as others are encouraged and provoked into their own encounter with God. We will find ourselves shining as a light in the world, in such a way, that God is glorified.

Can we believe that we are transfigured people? Can we allow the light of Christ to fill us even as we leave this place? Let me offer a glimpse you of what this might look like, as I finish with a quote from the American peace activist, Marianne Williamson. It's a quote made famous by Desmond Tutu, spoken as he had climbed his own mountain, and overcome... Williamson says:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others.”

I would be so bold as to change that last sentence - our presence actually *transfigures* others.

Let us go, and transfigure the world by our presence...

Amen