

Sermon, Last Sunday in Epiphany – Transfiguration

St Mark's Brookton & St Mary's Beverley, 27th February, 2022

Readings: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43

Hymns, Immortal, Invisible, God only wise; Christ whose glory fills the sky; Lord, the light of your love is shining; How good, Lord to be here

It has been my privilege over the years to officiate at many marriages and one of the experiences I remember from almost all of them is the wonderfully transfigured faces of both bride and groom born of intense joy. While it might be that brides stand out because of their beautiful bridal dress, or special hair style and make-up, and grooms glow in their dapper attire and well-groomed hair, it is their deep inner joy that shines out. Indeed, they are radiant from the inside. Likewise, many of you will have experienced, or witnessed, the shining eyes of grateful parents as they gaze in wonder at their firstborn child; or later in life their faces shine with pride as their child receives an award at a prize-giving ceremony.

Today we celebrate one of the five major milestones in the gospel narrative of the life of Jesus; his transfiguration: the others being his baptism, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. We celebrate a miracle which occurs to Jesus himself, and one which is recorded in all four Gospels.

In the text just before our Gospel passage for today, St Luke records that the disciples have received shattering news; something they would not have expected to hear. Jesus tells them that he, their best friend, and teacher, is to be crucified by the leaders of their nation. What must they have thought? Might they have had misgivings about following a leader who'll soon die? This was not what they would have expected of a Messiah!

To counter this thinking, Jesus takes his three closest followers, Peter, James and John, and provides them with a glimpse of whom he really is; ie the Son of God from heaven, not just the son of Mary from earth. The passage suggests a fascinating scene on the top of the mountain (a mountain from my experience tourist guides point out to you). While Jesus is in contact with heaven through prayer, his three friends

are asleep. We might wonder how much of Jesus' glorious transformation and conversation with Moses and Elijah the disciples missed?

We can only imagine the scene; Moses and Elijah coming to our Lord to speak with Him about his suffering and dying for us on another mountain, the Mount of Sacrifice, Calvary; that place where Jesus would effect a great deliverance for his followers, a greater Exodus than the exodus from Egypt under Moses. As a deliverer from slavery, Moses is a prototype of Jesus. Similarly, Elijah is more than a prophet; he was seen as a forerunner of the Messiah.

As such, Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about the events of Good Friday. In this moment of Christ's transfiguration glory, Moses and Elijah speak about our Saviour's inglorious death on the cross. It is here we, as well as the three disciples, are insiders to the knowledge that Jesus chooses to die with us and for us, rather than to live and reign in heaven, without us. As we come this week to the Season of Lent, it is good to be reminded that our Saviour is our fellow-sufferer, who understands from the inside our suffering and fear of death. This truth is one which our Lenten season seeks to illuminate further.

When Peter awakes, he wants to prolong the glory of this occasion. "Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said (Luke 9:33)." Graciously, our Lord makes no critical comment.

I trust God provides you with "mountain-top experiences" to strengthen you for your Christian life and duties. Of course, life's valleys of disappointment and frustration can help us to appreciate our mountain-top experiences more. Life in the valley is made more bearable by God's gift of joyous moments shared together.

Peter's, James', and John's experience of the transfiguration enabled them to trust what God says. What they heard would have made greater impact probably than what they saw. The voice of God said, "This is My Son, My Chosen; listen to Him." As we know, with Jesus, you get more than you see. You receive from Him "the words of eternal life", words full of the power and energy of eternity. We know the transforming

power of words like “I love you”. That is why no words can transform us better than words of forgiveness and comfort from Jesus. Behind every word of His, is our Lord’s everlasting love for us. We meet Jesus Christ, our Saviour, in the Gospel here and now. Similarly, the Gospels are our Exodus into the life, not of the Promised Land, but of the life of our Lord, through whom there is freedom from the fear of death, freedom from sin and guilt.

Jesus re-defined our idea of glory. His suffering on the cross is the most glorious act of love enacted by Jesus for us. Suffering and glory are no longer opposites. Our world thinks of glory in terms of privilege, power, and success. For Jesus, glory meant suffering for us, being obedient to His Father’s will, even if it meant death on a cross. That’s why we sing during Lent, “In the cross of Christ I glory”.

The Lenten season gives us opportunity to grow closer to Jesus by giving Him more of the most precious gift love can give anyone, the gift of time, time spent in prayer and the reading of His Word. A Lenten-season well-spent brings rich blessings into the events of the rest of the year. Countless Christians in the past have been unbelievably blessed by a faithful commemoration of Lent. God grant that this will be your and my experience this year.