

11th February 2024 – Morning Service

Transfiguration Sunday

Rev Alan Combes

Call to Worship

Incredible God, Lord of the universe, you speak and the whole earth is summoned to listen. The splendour of your divine glory shines forth. And we - God's faithful people - gather in anticipation. Let us seek to honour and glorify God by living righteous lives and let us worship God with praise and thanksgiving in our hearts.

StF 83 – Praise my soul the King of heaven

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| 1) Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; To his feet thy tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Who like thee his praise should sing? Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise the everlasting King! | 3) Father-like, he tends and spares us; Well our feeble frame he knows; In his hands he gently bears us, Rescues us from all our foes. Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Widely as his mercy flows. |
| 2) Praise him for his grace and favour To his people in distress; Praise him, still the same for ever, Slow to chide, and swift to bless. Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Glorious in his faithfulness. | 4) Angels in the heights, adore him; Ye behold him face to face; Sun and moon, bow down before him, Dwellers all in time and space. Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise with us the God of grace! |

Henry Francis Lyte

Prayer of Adoration¹

Gracious God, your love in Christ is a transforming love - it changes us, it changes our way of seeing and being, and how we respond to the world around us. Help us Lord, as we praise you this morning, to see afresh, the presence and effects of your love in the circumstances of our lives. As we lift your name on high, show us again your care and love for us through all the people who have loved us. Enable us to see and know how many times we have been spared the consequences of our sin and foolishness because of your grace and mercy.

Most of all, may your love become visible when we hear you knocking at the door of our hearts, and welcome Christ into our lives. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us that we might follow Christ's narrow way with confidence. And by the power of your Holy Spirit protect us, calm our fears and fill our hearts with love and concern for others. Even if our personal experiences of being loved have sometimes been disappointing, there is within the core of us, always alive, always yearning, your Spirit of love, which holds us and continues to transform us to be more Christ-like. We love because Christ first loved us. So we come before you, O God, in awe of your power and might. We come celebrating our belief that you chose to reveal yourself to us in Jesus Christ. In him your abundant love for all people is made visible. We adore you, O God, and we praise your holy name, and we pray that this time of worship will bring honour and glory to you. This we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

While we claim to celebrate the Risen Lord, sometimes our lives reveal our lack of faith in his power to deal with the world. So we confess the gap between our faith and our practice. We come, O Lord, on this day of glory to confess our lack of trust. While we sing of your lordship over all creation, we have, too often, acted as though you are powerless in the face of the world. Help us to live with confidence in your presence today and in hope for life with you forever.

Assurance of Pardon

Lord may we together, hear the good news of the gospel which says: If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. In Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God. (based on 1 John 2:1-2, NRSV)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 335 – Rejoice the Lord is King

1) Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks, and sing,
And triumph evermore:

*Ch1) Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice! Again I say: Rejoice!*

2) Jesus the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When he had purged our stains,
He took his seat above:

3) His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules both earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus given:

Charles Wesley

4) He sits at God's right hand
Till all his foes submit,
And bow to his command,
And fall beneath his feet:

5) Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take his servants up
To their eternal home:

*Ch2) We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
God's trumpet-call shall sound: Rejoice!*

Reading: 2 Cor 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Reading: Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sermon - Encountering God is Transformative

About halfway through His active ministry Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James and John, withdrew to a high mountain apart (probably Mt. Hermon) for prayer. Whilst praying Jesus was 'transfigured,' - Matthew's account says: *'his face shone like the sun,' 'and his clothes were shining white'*. They were high on the mountain. It would have been late and cold. Luke's account tells us that the disciples were sleepy and at first only dimly conscious of the wonder in progress before their eyes. From the brightness came the sound of voices. Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah, the subject of their discussion, as the disciples probably learned later, was of Christ's 'departure' - being fulfilled soon in Jerusalem. As the disciples came to themselves, the figures of Moses and Elijah seemed to withdraw, at which point Peter impetuously demanded tents to be set up for Jesus and His heavenly visitors so that the stay might be prolonged and, if possible, made permanent as this place was marked out as special.

Just then a cloud swept over them, and out of the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love: listen to him." In awe the disciples prostrated themselves and in silence waited. Suddenly, lifting up their eyes they saw no one, except Jesus. (Mat_17:1-13; Mar_9:2-13; Luk_9:28-36).

These were the incredible events that transpired but I wonder how we might understand their significance? There can be no doubt that this moment in Mark's Gospel marked a key change point in Christ's three year journey of preaching, teaching and healing. From this time onwards, he walked and spoke and acted consciously under the shadow of the cross and a strict silence on the subject was agreed with the witnesses of His transfiguration until after *'the Son of man should have risen from the dead.'* So it is good that we consider these events today - in the week before the start of Lent - and the beginning of our own journey towards the cross.

In the previous chapter, Mk. 8v27, we read that people had been asking the question: Who is Jesus? It is clear from their response that it was a hot topic.

Mark 8:28 *"They disciples replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others one of the other prophets."*

Some say this, some say that - it was clearly a topic being debated at the time. And it wasn't just the crowds who were talking about Jesus; his own disciples were asking the same question. We read in Mark 8:29: *Then he asked them. "But what about you, who do you say that I am" and Peter answered, "You are the Christ."*

In Matthew's Gospel 16:16 says that Peter said *'You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.'*

- The Christ – meaning the anointed one,
- The Messiah – the promised saviour who would deliver God's chosen people from Roman Rule
- The Son of the Living God – more than just a man – God made flesh, human and divine... who will return in glory.

The question 'Who is this Jesus?' was burning on everyone's lips. In Mark 8 we hear human responses. Now in Chapter 9 we see a divine response... The Transfiguration answers this question definitively: Who is Jesus? God speaks and says: v7 *'This is my son – the beloved (the one whom I love)'*.

Christ's Ministry was already underway, he was well established as a rabbi, a travelling preacher, teacher and healer. He had already received the Holy Spirit at his Baptism and had been tested in the desert. God's blessing is on his ministry and this mountain moment of transfiguration marked a distinct change in Christ's life from one of proclaiming God's Kingdom come on earth to the fulfilment of his role as Messiah, the promised saviour, our saviour. It was the capstone of his public ministry and from this point on Jesus had to face the sacrificial character of His mission; the certainty that death, soon and cruel, was to be His path. From here his mission was the creation of the new covenant through deliverance and fulfilment of Law (represented by Moses) and in true worship and the fulfilment of all prophecy (represented by Elijah). BUT in an unexpected and new way; the way of love, the law of God (as it says in Jeremiah 31) now written on people's hearts.

These events assure us that Christ's journey to Jerusalem, his triumphal entry, and ultimate betrayal, not only by Judas but by virtually all those around him, his death on a cross for us and for our sins and his resurrection and ascension into heaven were all for us and for our salvation. These events were not an accident, a mistake, a good man's mission gone wrong. They were not God losing control of events as things went horribly awry. No. However hard this journey, however difficult the steps from this mountain to the lonely hill of the cross, Jesus was ready to take the steps necessary to save you and me, to redeem us and to enable us to be at-one with God again.

If we all look back I am sure we have moments in our lives that were in some way transforming; the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, an accident or mountain top experience. There are moments, both good and bad, that not only changed us but that stick in our minds, that we return to, that remind us of something precious or important. This moment wasn't just about Jesus; it was transforming for Peter, James and John. They could easily have denied this experience as a dream, or simply decided it was too fanciful to tell anyone about and so deny that it happened. But Peter writes in 2Peter1:16-18:

We have not depended on made-up stories in making known to you the mighty coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With our own eyes we saw his greatness. We were there when he was given honour and glory by God the Father, when the voice came to him from the Supreme Glory, saying, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased!" We ourselves heard this voice coming from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain.

These three faithful disciples were given a glimpse of heaven and the true glory of Jesus in order to strengthen them for the struggles and suffering that was yet to come. And the transforming command of action that they and we are given in this passage is simple and clear - so short in fact that we often miss it, skipping by the end of the verse without noticing those three key words and what they mean for our lives. Of all the many, wonderful and deep things God could have said from the cloud that day God said this: 'LISTEN to Jesus' - which can be translated as 'be obedient to him'. In the heart of an amazing encounter, glorious in its richness where Jesus symbolically supersedes Moses and Elijah, God's speaks and gives this simple command; 'listen to him.' On this Sunday before Lent – a period traditionally set aside for reflection on our place before God - we are reminded once again that it is Jesus, God's son, who is our guiding example. It is Jesus and his narrow way who provides all the answers we will ever need. I wonder if this Lent – we might seek out the opportunity to stop and to listen to him. And in so doing, may we have our own transforming encounter with God that uplifts and sustains us. Amen.

StF 494 – Come thou fount of every blessing

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| 1) Come, thou fount of every blessing, Tune my heart to sing thy grace; Streams of mercy never ceasing Call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious measure Sung by flaming tongues above; O the vast, the boundless treasure Of my Lord's unchanging love! | 3) O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be'. Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter, Bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love; Take my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it from thy courts above! |
| 2) Here I find my greatest treasure: 'Hither by thy help I've come', And I hope, by thy good pleasure, Safely to arrive at home. Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wandering from the fold of God; He, to rescue me from danger, Interposed his precious blood. | |

Robert Robinson

Prayers of Intercession

God, most gracious and most holy, grant us the help of your Spirit as we pray for the Church and the world.

We pray for the Church in every land, for this church and for other local churches, that we may worship and serve you with reverence and joy....[*Silence*]

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the peoples of the world, and for the leaders of the nations, that all may work together for justice and peace....[*Silence*]

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who are ill or distressed, for the lonely and the bereaved, and for those in any other need or trouble, that they may be comforted and sustained....[*Silence*]

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Father, we remember before you all your servants who have died in the faith of Christ. We pray that we too may lead faithful and godly lives in this world, and finally share with all the saints in everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 134 – Christ whose glory fills the skies

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| 1) Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true, the only Light, Sun of Righteousness, arise, Triumph o'er the shades of night; Day-spring from on high, be near; Day-star, in my heart appear. | 3) Visit then this soul of mine; Pierce the gloom of sin and grief; Fill me, radiance divine; Scatter all my unbelief; More and more thyself display, Shining to the perfect day. |
| 2) Dark and cheerless is the morn Unaccompanied by thee: Joyless is the day's return, Till thy mercy's beams I see, Till they inward light impart, Glad my eyes, and warm my heart. | |

Charles Wesley

Blessing

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

¹ *Abridged from Love: A Guide for Prayer by J Syrup Bergan and Sister Marie Schwan, CSJ*