

Sunday Before Lent 7th February The
transfiguration Luke 9

Collect

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the
cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer
with him
and be changed into his likeness, from
glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Post Communion

Holy God,
we see your glory in the face of Jesus
Christ:
may we who are partakers at his table
reflect his life in word and deed,
that all the world may know his power
to change and save.

This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord

Transfigure – a change to the face,

when have you seen written into someone's face the experience they have been through either recently or years ago? When Jenny Adams was married in STA last year she was so radiant it was hard for me to concentrate on reading through the order of service.

Sometimes people return from a great adventure visibly changed, or a spate in hospital where their appearance has greatly altered. Sometimes people seek out exhilaration in order to feel fully alive, some have even said that at least a traumatic experience made them feel something whereas most of life seems to lack luster, intrigue, fulfilment. People are chasing an experience, they desire to feel engaged and motivated.

Who's ever been up a mountain?

I read a book about how a mountaineer had a sleeping bag lined with reindeer fur but it was so cold that the only way to get into the bag was to defrost the fur with his own body warmth, or lack

of. Mountains still fascinate and intrigue people and these days, mountains are seen as something to be conquered, not feared. However, throughout history they have held people's imagination as a place where the sacred resides, the gods are found, mystery happens. How fitting then that in today's gospel, God the Son and God the Father meet mysteriously with Moses and Elijah. At the transfiguration we stand on the precipice, having travelled to the highest point of Jesus' popularity in the previous chapter of Luke's gospel, here we approach Lent looking down from the mountain top towards the cross and the hill of shame, Golgotha.

It's hard to imagine

what this was really like, it has a dream like quality to it, certainly the disciples were 'weighed down with sleep', but the meaning is more significant than the facts. For instance, how did Luke know it was Moses and Elijah who were there unless of course their names were used? But it could also mean that here were representatives of the Law in the person of Moses

and of the Prophets in the person of Elijah.
Neither of them died according to the OT and here they were returned to be with Jesus in the present moment – we wash dreamily in and out of reality and other worldliness. Talking of washing, ... remember this advert from the 1980s?

How do you get ultra-white without boil washing...? New Dazz Ultra without boil wash, for a white you could almost mistake for boil wash white...new dash ultra, at a price that's right!

²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

This isn't the only occasion when Jesus' appearance alters dramatically...also on the morning of his resurrection, Easter Day itself....

as he left the tomb,

28:3 His ² appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

Strong sunlight

Pours into hidden places reveals concealed things
exposes what has been kept from our eyes. The
true identity of Jesus was confirmed by the
change to His appearance and by the
announcement from God that here was my Son,
my chosen – listen to him!

At the START! Course yesterday

We considered the different ways Jesus has been
conveyed in art from the Catacombs in the fourth
century, to the Turin Shroud, through to the
Guevara and the Bar Code Jesus. We have
transfigured the face of Jesus throughout the ages
and suggested at times he's a revolutionary, at
others gentle meek and mild, looking more like
Bjorn Borg than a first century Jew! Take a look at
the pictures on the notice board and decide which
you like and if any cause you a problem.

What do you need to prepare to climb a great height?

It's obvious we need to be specially trained, learn
from an expert, have someone to guide us and

bear some of the load. There are dangers and pitfalls some of which are obvious, others not so.

Can you think of a moment?

in your life which you would describe as a mountain top experience – what happened and how does it feel to recall it now?

Peter is keen to hang on

to the glorious mountain top experience, quite understandably, and so do we. 'Just as they were leaving...' he says let's put up tents.

But, can you recall that feeling of the last but one day

of holiday, there's a desire to deny the reality to want to hang on indefinitely to the moment.

Hopefully, Sabbath and holiday gives us a rest, a chance to lie down in green pastures and by still waters but in the end, get up we must and descend the mountain and face the ordinary everyday challenges.

Jesus had extraordinary challenges for Peter John and James so perhaps this astonishing experience would prepare them for Jesus' re-appearance

after his death, prepare them for ministry after his ascension and help them recall the words about his death which they found so difficult to understand at the time.

Life in the valley

the portway, the harbourside, Ashton Gate might seem mundane, ordinary, lacking the thrill, the excitement the glamour, but its where humanity resides, the messy stuff of life. In valleys around the world, scarce resources are fought over, people get sick, civilizations rise and fall, governments are formed and dissolved, dictators rise and are toppled, contracts are signed and broken, there's war and there's peace. But not every day, thank fully. Most of us have the chance to reveal God's glory in small ways towards individuals in unremarkable but testing circumstances.

God calls out to each of us is that we are to reflect His glory, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us as the mystery of the glorious mountain top experience is transfigured into the hill side glory of the cross. As we get involved in the everyday

healing of a broken world so others will see something of God in us as we point people to His kingdom coming to earth.

Here's a challenge for us all

– can we see something of God's glory in the faces of those around us? When we can't, it might help to remember that everyone is created by God and therefore His design.

Here's a great saying from Einstein,

*There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a
miracle.*

This really got me thinking. How is a loaf of bread miraculous – talk to your neighbor for a moment. What goes into producing it? How does it bless you and others in the sharing of it? What happens to it when eaten and how does your body know what to do with it? Why do you get hungry in the first place? The more we consider it, the more we can see God involved in all of creation around us and we begin to see more and more clearly that if

we have eyes to see, we will see God, as Simeon and Anne at the presentation of Christ in the temple, just a baby but nevertheless they saw the fulfilment of God's plans. They had unveiled eyes with which to perceive the glory of God. They were filled with the Spirit which enables each believer to see the bigger picture of God's kingdom coming into the world.

Jesus identifies how ill-prepared were the people and especially the disciples to cope with the ordinary demands of living life as a believer. They failed to trust in the person and authority of Jesus.

V41 'You faithless and perverse generation

' – was Jesus talking to the crowd the disciples or both? It does seem harsh, I wonder if the disciples' difficulty in understanding and believing what God was doing in sending the long-expected Messiah reveals the lack of understanding and faith generally. The sole purpose of their ability to carry out healings was to point people to God's glory v43 says 'all were astounded at the greatness of God'.

The disciples needed to put their confidence, not in their own ability power or strength, but in the God who spoke in clouds on Mount Hermon at this transfiguration, in the God of who gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, in the God of who raised Jesus from the tomb on the hill of the skull, that is, Golgotha.

How then can we prepare for life in the valley?

Jesus also had ordinary time which he used to prepare himself for the challenges that lay ahead – he went away to pray, he worshipped in the synagogue with his extended family, for thirty years he kept a low profile soaking up the scriptures and the culture in order that he could speak with authority into the lives of the people with whom he'd grown up.

What are the landslides crevices crevasses snow storms rising mists falling fog, blinding clouds approaching your life? There are snags all around us to trip us up, distract us, take our focus away from following Jesus. Temptations, busy-ness, pressure to conform, tiredness, lifestyle choices. Instead, we can get ready, be prepared, be

intentional, make a plan to navigate through the valley as times become testing.

Throughout history we have changed the face of Jesus to conform to our ideas, hopes and aspirations of the Saviour we want. In fact, no different from first century Palestine where the people wanted God to deliver them from their problems. Trouble is, exactly who Jesus is continuing to contradict and challenge our belief. The real mountain to climb is our own frailty, our weakness, our falling asleep on the job, our fear when He calls us from the cloud to take up our cross daily. We cling to the summit of a great experience when we have known God in all His glory, but we fail to see His handiwork in the ordinary. May the Spirit breathe oxygen into us in the valley as well as at high altitude so we are transfigured by the ordinary everyday needs of others, for there we will see God, but perhaps not looking as we expect.