

# **The Transfiguration**

26 February 2023

Exodus 34.29-35

First Sunday in Lent 2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2

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Luke 9.28-36

(it was an error in having these readings for this Sunday!)

## **A new view**

There are times in our lives which are very significant because something new happens. I remember in my late teens some friends talking and Jane said she was going out with Paul. One of my very teasing friends said 'what has changed, you've only ever spoken Paul as a friend, now you say you are going out together.' Jane didn't quite know what to say, she was a bit embarrassed. She had disclosed something about the relationship had changed and not realised it herself.

Life seems to work at many levels and it might take time to see the many aspects. Things might be going on that we do not recognise. There are times when we have to take stock and see things afresh. It can be very comforting to have a simple and straight forward view of life. But the truth is probably rather more complicated and maybe not as easy to understand as we would like.

## **A turning point**

The passage we had from Luke's gospel is part of a great turning point in Jesus' ministry and how he is inviting his disciples to see the deeper things of what he is called to.

There had recently been the feeding of the 5000 which would have been a huge success. A lot of people would have benefited from the food and been challenged to pay attention to who Jesus is. It is followed by Jesus being with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi and he asks them 'who do people say that I am?' He then asks his disciples 'who do you say that I am?' Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah.

Messiah is a title of God's person who will deliver the nation. Over many previous years people have been looking for someone who will bring about freedom from oppressive foreign rulers and prosperity. In his ministry up until now Jesus has not wanted to be identified as The Messiah. In fact there is something called 'the messianic secret' This looks at how Jesus is very careful about his true identity so he is not just seen as the fulfilment of current expectations.

When Peter says Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus commends him. Jesus then goes on to say he will

be betrayed and put to death. To this Peter says it must not happen and Jesus rebukes him.

It is as if Peter has had a clear view of what messiah means, So does Jesus and they're not the same thing.

## **Transfiguration**

Our gospel passage this morning follows on from Caesarea Philippi and Jesus takes some disciples up a mountain. Jesus becomes gloriously transformed. He is joined by two significant people from Israel's past who are Moses and Elijah. They represent the law and the prophets who have guided the nation through centuries.

We are told that there is a conversation about Jesus departure. Departure could be a euphemism for death. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to die.

Now the Gospel was originally written in the Greek language because in those days that is how you wrote about significant ideas. The word departure in the Greek is Exodus. This brings to mind the great deliverance that the Hebrews experienced from slavery in Egypt through Moses. The same Moses who had now come to talk to Jesus.

To Peter this is whole glorious event is something to hold onto. It is wonderful and must continue as long as possible. So he says 'let's build some shelters and we can make it all last.'

To this a voice comes from heaven and says 'this is my beloved son whom I have chosen, listen to him.' Poor old Peter! At Caesarea Philippi Jesus had told him off for missing the point. Now the voice of God from heaven tells him off too.

The point of the Transfiguration is to see the glory of Jesus. This is so much more than just feeding 5000 people. The glory is also about his departure. Jesus' ministry has steadily grown but it must now go on in a new and unexpected way. The path will be about his departure, his death. It will be about an exodus which originally was about freedom from slavery and entering the promised land. But now it will be about freedom from sin and eternal life. Jesus' ministry will be fulfilled with death and resurrection.

## **Going deeper**

I began this address by remembering a conversation that a friend called Jane had. She was caught out having inadvertently reassessed what a friend called Paul meant to her. Having

always spoken about him as her friend she then described them as going out. The interesting thing was that she was rather embarrassed.

I'm going to take the view that this was about the identity of the relationship changing. It was entering into a deeper phase. As time passed they were more committed to each other and the responsibilities were growing. There is a trade off between the freedoms of being single and the commitments of sharing a life.

The start of a relationship might be clear with enjoyable meals or going to see a film. It is a time about fun and offering enjoyments that you have so they could now be shared.

A deeper relationship means understanding a person's sorrows as well as their joys. Some of their friends and relatives might be a bit of a trial. Practical arrangements might be more difficult if they have to move away.

Or it might be that you have disagreements or you do things that are greatly upsetting. How do you navigate your shared life when it doesn't go well?

Dare I say that for any part of life to go well you have to come to terms with trouble. We would very much like to plan and have the scheme be a success. We would very much like to form friendships that are full of ease and generosity. But it is not always so.

A big part of growing up is realising that life can be very unfair. There can be many points of view and we cannot have it all around way. We have to discover that as well as the joys of life there are the challenges to be faced. Life works well when we grasp painful situations and we do not run from them or just seek to blame others for what we do not like.

I do not know what happened to Jane and Paul. The changes in their relationship could be seen as a disappointment if they just expected a simple happiness with falling in love. Or they could begin to see each other more clearly and give themselves to each other with patience and understanding and find life flourish.

### ***Listen to him***

It is as if the people of Jesus day wanted a simple sort of rescue operation. They knew what their heroes should be like, strong, upstanding and victorious. Strangely they had given this title to a number of people in past years each of whom turned out to be a disappointment. Perhaps it

wasn't the person who failed but the job description they were given.

Jesus was very wise and understood that job description his people wished to give to him and he knew that sort of Messiah was not going to work. But Jesus' reflections on some of the less known aspects of scripture meant he knew that God was about a deeper work.

When Peter wanted to stay put at the scene of transfiguration the voice from heaven came and said 'listen to him'. This meant the words of Jesus. It also meant the path Jesus was purposely taking to go to Jerusalem and suffering. Most importantly, that in the most unlikely place of all, that of the cross, the real role of Messiah was going to be revealed.

This is the season of Lent which is an opportunity to give ourselves in a deeper way to listening. To read the Bible, particularly the Gospels and the Psalms which open us up in new ways of seeing life. We should also be listening to ourselves; particularly the confusions or the pains. We need to get beyond trying to get peaceful and finding out why we are not.

It is strange how Jesus was kind to people and yet he was resented by others for it? They didn't want to listen to him, why not?

Jesus knew that with God you were going to have to embrace the whole of life. There is joy and sorrow, There is wisdom and confusion. There is success and sin. Human temptation to want to sort the wheat from the chaff doesn't work. The greatest act Jesus did was to embrace human life even if it meant rejection, pain and death. Not of course that is everything as there is the resurrection. But you do have to embrace the whole of life and Jesus is there, Jesus is here, to accompany us on that task.

### ***Peter***

We are instructed to obey the voice from heaven which said 'listen to him'. The person of Jesus is always to be centre stage. But there is also Peter full of enthusiasm, often rebuked and frequently failing. He is a great sign of hope because Jesus never gives up on him. Peter remains embraced, encouraged and forgiven. The life of Peter reflects the glory of Christ just as the moon reflects the sun. Like it or not Peter stands for us. We are not called to be a Messiah. We are called to be disciples and in that to be assured got the right sort of glory will come our way too.