

Sermon on Sunday 6 August 2023

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: 2 Peter 1. 16-19 & Luke 9. 28-36

Glory

Diehard Fans of Harry Potter might know that one of the required classes at Hogwarts is Transfiguration; the magic art of turning one thing into another.

Today, Christians remember a very different Transfiguration. It's that seminal mountaintop moment when, whilst praying, Jesus' appearance is suddenly transfigured.

He doesn't change, his appearance does. Literally, he begins to shine Jesus, shine! And then, as if this supernatural glow-up isn't enough, it all becomes even more surreal, because suddenly, he's joined by two legendary and long-dead figures of Jewish history; the big guns - Moses the Lawgiver and Elijah the Prophet. These spirits of religion-past then begin to strike up a conversation with Jesus about what lies ahead of him; his destiny; his ultimate sacrifice. Again, a bit like that moment when Harry Potter is joined by the spirits of family and friends who comfort and strengthen him before he makes his own ultimate sacrifice.

These two religious heavyweights are actually there to give credence to the identity and ministry of Jesus. It's a way of

saying, loud and clear: this Jesus is the One the prophets (like Elijah) were talking about; the One who would bring balance and fulfilment to the Law (of Moses).

And, understandably, Jesus' inner circle of friends is gob smacked. One of them, Peter, in fact, doesn't want it to end. 'Let's put up some tents,' he says, 'let's never leave this place.'

I wonder if you've ever asked yourself why Peter wanted to stay?

Maybe he'd been listening to all this talk of ultimate sacrifice and, understandably, was thinking, 'Don't wanna go there'.

Or was he just enjoying bathing in the celebrity of religious royalty? Maybe he had big questions about their legendary lives; about the afterlife, perhaps? Who doesn't?

Perhaps it was the opposite. In that moment, he actually had no questions. Everything suddenly made complete and utter sense. He needed no further answers, no further proof.

Maybe it felt like time had stopped, that heaven had touched earth, and he just didn't want that high to end.

Or, was it perhaps, in glimpsing the glory of Jesus, he suddenly understood that that same glory was part of him, too?

Glory is something we often associate with the divine, the untouchable, the unobtainable. And, for many, the story of the Transfiguration is proof that Jesus is divine; a bit like Superman pulling back his shirt to reveal his super-costume, his super-nature. What if, however, on that mountain, those three friends weren't witnessing the unveiling of a divine super-being, but, in that moment, glimpsed something of the glory of a human being fully alive?

A saint called Irenaeus once said, 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive'. And by that, I think, he meant there's something in every human life that's divine; glorious. A glory within you; a glory within me; a divine spark, an extraordinary potential and beauty; an inextinguishable light; something of the very presence and nature of the divine. Well, wow!

And, yes, it comes stored in cracked vessels. We're all broken, but as the great Leonard Cohen once sang, 'There's a crack in everything,' but 'that's how the light gets in'. And maybe, it's also where the light gets out. When we own our failure; when we acknowledge our weakness, when we dare to be vulnerable, light gets out. Healing starts, truth is released and permission is given for others to say, 'You know what? Me too'.

There's a light in every one of us, a light nothing can extinguish, a light that's made to shine. It's what we recognise in each other when we share the peace or the Namaste. The light in me honours the light in you. And that's the best place I know to begin when

faced with people we don't like or understand. They, too, carry that same light.

It's significant, I think, that Jesus' light was revealed as he was praying. You see, prayer doesn't change God, it changes us. We are transfigured, our perspective changes. We begin to see differently. It's only through prayer that I've been able to forgive; both myself and others. It's only through prayer that I've begun to see the circumstances of my life from another, from a higher perspective.

It's only in prayer that I tune out the voices that criticise and belittle me, and tune in that same voice which every second whispers to me those same words Jesus heard on the mountain and earlier in the river; 'You're my child, my Chosen'.

Last Monday, I returned from holiday in my homeland, Northern Ireland. It was wonderful to be with my kids who hadn't been there for about seven years; to spend time with family, taste a proper Guinness, enjoy the craic and the breathtaking *Game of Thrones* landscape. It's eight days I'll never forget. Halfway through, however, it suddenly hit me that although I've always associated my homeland with my repression; with cruel religion and crueler homophobia, I was actually walking taller, prouder, unshackled from that past.

I'd like to say that it was because things have changed there. Some have, some haven't. What's changed, actually, is me. I no longer carry the old shame or anger. That's been transfigured;

pulled aside to reveal the glory of being authentically me, of being more fully alive. I wonder what might be the next thing in our lives which needs that transfiguration; that one thing that needs to be transformed to reveal more of the glory of being a human being more fully alive?



Luke 9. 28-36:

Now about eight days after these sayings, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 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. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.