

The Transfiguration 27th Feb 2022

Transfiguration Sunday 6th August (Thanksgiving for victory over Turks in Siege of Belgrade in 1456!)so why has the lectionary given us this story of the Transfiguration now? We've just finished the season of Epiphany...

The Transfiguration is an Epiphany story. ...it makes manifest God's glory in Christ; it reveals His identity as God's Son. , But it also belongs with Lent and Easter. ...

Our reading today begins "about a week after He had said these things" - Peter had recognised Jesus as God's Messiah and Jesus had gone on to tell the disciples what that meant ,that he would , suffer and die and rise, and you , **he told the disciples, must also tread this path.** Peter was aghast and as they turn towards Jerusalem the disciples move in an attitude of foreboding-they knew Jesus was moving towards death .And Jesus knew that he would be scourged and beaten and that the disciples needed encouragement so he took them on what we might call a field trip...as if Jesus was saying " **Before you face the cross see the Glory**". From this moment on, the narrative leads us towards the Passion, towards Jerusalem, **and in Lent we prepare ourselves for the events of Good Friday. We walk with the disciples...and identify with their experience.**

The Transfiguration is a pivotal point in Jesus' life-it's in all 3 synoptic (from the same viewpoint).John's gospel is different -less narrative and it's great themes of light and darkness, Jesus' teaching of himself as the vine, the Good Shepherd the Light of the world are unique to John -much less narrative and more a theological discourse, an unveiling of who Jesus was-God in human form... and one could wonder whether, if indeed the author was John the disciple (whether a simple fisherman could have recalled in such detail and written so eloquently) which is disputed, whether those wonderful words in the first chapter were indeed referring to the Transfiguration "**And we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father , full of grace and truth.**"

So on the Mountain Jesus is transfigured and momentarily Jesus moves from earthly life .. the full glory of God that was veiled in cloak of Jesus' humanity now suddenly bursting forth. ...His face shone with the brilliance and intensity of the sun..where else have we read this in Scripture...in the OT reading we heard about Moses . Earlier he had asked to see God but had been had told "no one can see my face" but he pointed to a place in the rocks where Moses could hide so that all he would see was the glory of God shining from his back...and even that was so radiant that Moses' face shone like the sun...but it was the shining of a creature who had been in God's presence and reflected the light...not the Face of God. But the intense light on Jesus' face, and on his clothes such as no launderer on Earth could produce (Mark) was not a reflection but from within Christ Himself

Jesus doesn't reflect the light of God...he IS the glory..the Shekhina (the Rabbinic word) seen by Saul, Israelites in the wilderness, presence of God himself...from Jesus came that light.

For Peter a lasting impression...epistle 2Pet1 16-18-not a concocted myth but "we heard the voice from heaven when we were with Him on the mountain."

Some have attempted to explain away the supernatural elements, the radiance of the Transfiguration could have been the morning sunlight rising over the misty hills! But for me the line between the natural and the supernatural is very tenuous...let me digress and explain. As a medical student I

studied the intricacies of human anatomy, physiology, biochemistry. Indeed there were probably times as I sat over my textbooks that I cried out to God, "Why did you have to make it so complicated?" Much more recently, I watched a series of programmes presented by Professor Brian Cox. He asked in that programme **"Why are we here and where did we come from"**? Elements are the building blocks of life on Earth-carbon hydrogen, oxygen and water etc. We are, he said, made up of these elements that were created in space, *released when stars exploded and delivered to the Earth in meteorites...*so we are he says made from clouds of dust floating in space...truly children of the stars. So this adds new meaning to those words from Genesis that we use on Ash Wednesday. **"from dust you came and to dust you will return"**. *The likelihood of these atoms coming together in such a way as to create life, it is said, is MINUTE, truly a miracle which Scientists cannot explain!* And there is so much more to life than just the particles that make up this extraordinary organism which we call the human body.. **What is this miracle of life that we take for granted so much of the time.** What is it that makes us conscious of what is going on around us and controls how we react. What is going on when we laugh ..or weep...or love..or feel compassion...or value good above evil...or are moved by a picture or music ...or indeed experience God. They did not teach us that at medical school. As the Psalmist (139, Messy church)said, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made".

When I started to prepare this sermon I determined that I would focus on God's glory as it was manifest in the Transfiguration, but Simon's Sermon a few weeks ago ..**Jesus' manifesto** lead me to reflect on what I had been reading earlier that morning... that many of the world's most devout writers and theologians have produced their works and conclusions through titanic periods of gloom and terror and despair that had driven them in their wretchedness to cling not to Christ's glory which makes them only too aware of their short comings, but to the cross.

Martin Luther was one such person. In writing about these matters, Luther distinguished between what he called a "theology of glory" and "the theology of the cross."(Easter/ GoodFriday people.)

An Easter person expects total success, finding all the answers, winning all the battles, and living happily ever after. It is all about his strength, and power, and works. He expects his church to be perfect and always to grow. If he gets sick, he expects God to heal him.

And if he experiences failure and weakness, if his church has problems and if he is not healed, then he is often utterly confused

But, Luther pointed out, when God chose to save us, He did not follow the way of glory. He did not come as a great hero-king. Rather, He came as a baby laid in an animal trough, a man of sorrows with no place to lay His head. And He saved us by the weakness and shame of dying on a cross. Those who follow Him will have crosses of their own: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" -faith in the Gospel, putting our trust in what Christ accomplished for us on His cross, entails acknowledging our own weakness and the failure of our own works but also that when we suffer whether from all the anxieties and problems that life throws at us or because we are having problems clinging to any sort of faith at all Christ is with us in our suffering.

So Martin Luther says Christ is "hidden" in our sufferings but he is nevertheless truly present, and one of the ways in which we find Him is in those who come alongside us.

So from Simon's sermon.(with his permission!) I quote, " that's why we come to Church, to meet God, sometimes directly but sometimes through his body-the church-one another . And

there is the deeper miracle. That God chooses to use us -a community of wounded healers... limping along helping each other to stand.” .

When God chooses to show the divine face, it's not normally in direct revelations of Himself. Sometimes it's as we hear inspiring words of Scripture and preaching, or in music or as we pray, but often it's in a human face. Even in these times, God appears to us, in the undeserved kindnesses of other people, in the person who comes alongside and listens when we are at our lowest.

Simon...this is how it would have ended but I omitted the bit in brackets after a conversation with David the day before and the bishop@s directive and changed it.

(And this happens because they have been transformed into the image of God who is love!

1 Cor3:18 We who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory are transformed into His image with increasing glory which comes from the Lord!

It's then that we find that glory creeps up on us unawares, strengthening us, as it did those first disciples, for the road ahead. I leave you with a quote:

From the closing scenes of Victor Hugo's great novel of redemption –sung by the ex convict but reformed Jean Valjean as he is dying:

Take my hand and lead me to salvation

Take my love, for love is everlasting

And remember the truth that once was spoken:

To love another person is to see the face of God.)

---but I ended by explaining that I would try and relate this by making 3 points from the theme of God's glory in relation to the Ukraine situation:

1. We've thought about the disciples on the road to Jerusalem. In Thought for the Day, the day after Russia started its invasion of Ukraine the Archbishop of Canterbury reminded listeners of Jesus' words: "*In the world you will have trouble but do not be afraid, I have overcome the world*" He added the hope that we would find our resolution, peace and certainty in the knowledge that underneath are the everlasting arms.

2. We have thought about the glory that was manifest on the mountain as Jesus was transfigured. At this time we need to cling to God's promise that a time will come when the whole earth will be filled with God's glory.

3. In the meantime the desperate plight of the Ukraine people has flashed endlessly on our television screens. We need to pray that God will be with them carrying them safely on their journeys and that they will see God's glory revealed in the faces of those who come alongside them to give them help and comfort.

