

A Reflection on Luke 9:28-36 - The Transfiguration

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Sunday 27th February 2022 – The Sunday before Lent

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, gracious Lord. Amen

We live in a world where we often, for different reasons, have to identify ourselves. Footballers have their name and number on their back. When we travel abroad we use a passport. People might wear identity badges on lanyards round their necks showing their name and their job description.

Others in shops and supermarkets may have a badge on their chest which states who they are. I'm sure many of us have worn such a thing at one time or another. Some of these badges secure entry through locked doors that are forbidden to others. What they do is legitimise one's presence in a particular company or place.

Jesus wore no such identity badge. In fact he probably wore simple dress and sandals, much as worn by others in his day. Nothing to the casual observer would have picked him out straightaway as the living God among us. Yet the disciples knew that when Jesus went to pray, things happened! Doors to the kingdom were opened and they could only watch in amazement.

Our reading today is all about who Jesus is. In Luke's gospel, Peter has just boldly declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. He has learned this through what he has seen Jesus do and say and he is about to witness a dramatic confirmation of his declaration in what happens on that mountainside. Jesus has taken his three chosen disciples to bear witness to what will happen through prayer. Peter, John and James, tired but awake, witness the Transfiguration of Christ.

Jesus changes his form and appearance while he is praying. His face shines and his clothes become a dazzling white. He becomes the very source of divine glory and the three honoured disciples watch this happening. Jesus is in the presence of Moses and Elijah who also attest to his identity. Moses who represents the Law to them and Elijah who represents the prophets. They point to Jesus' identity in a way that is beyond the imagination of men.

Peter is so filled with the enormity of what is happening that he suggests he should make shelters for them. He doesn't want this revelation to end.

It is a mountain top experience. But no sooner has he opened his mouth than events completely overshadow them all. God himself speaks to identify Jesus. 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'. And so saying the scene returns to the way it was.

Luke tells us that they kept silence. We can only imagine their amazement. Did they understand the need to keep quiet about what had happened? Was it because nobody else would believe it? I don't know the answer, but I do know that Jesus had kingdom work to complete and the very next day He is back with people, healing and preaching. Perhaps the three disciples used the time to ponder what they had witnessed, so overwhelmed were they by what they had seen.

Well in similar way to the changes in Jesus on that mountain, prayer changes us too. As we draw near to God in our quiet prayer time, it's not just the person or situation of our prayer that we lift to God, but also our very selves. We are saying, 'Lord I don't have all the answers. I need you to show me the way, to show me what can be done. I need your grace in my life and the lives of those for whom I pray'. And in the stillness we may hear something new and helpful. We don't shine with a dazzling white but we have drawn closer to a Father who listens and loves his children.

This is our last Sunday before we enter the new season of Lent in the Church's year. We begin a new season when self-examination, penitence, self-denial, study and preparation for Easter characterise our liturgy and prayer.

Next Tuesday, as we enter Lent, we may well find ourselves experiencing the annual joy of pancakes! You may have heard this one before, but I like the story of the two young brothers who were arguing over who should have the first pancake which their mother was making. Their mother was filled with wisdom and said, "If Jesus was here, he would say, 'Dear brother. I can wait. You have the first pancake'". Filled with a new understanding the older brother turned to his younger sibling and replied, "OK you be Jesus!".

There is something of value in this short story which is about our relationships. Those whom we see every day. How do we value people? Do our thoughts and actions speak of the love we have for them or do we selfishly make decisions that suit us, put ourselves first. Sometimes, in the apparent rush of life, we forget to stop and think clearly about how to love as Jesus would have us love others.

I know that every one of us will have been impacted by current world news. Russia has done the unthinkable and our hearts are with all those who will

suffer the consequences. We all received in the daily mailing on Friday, prayers for this evil situation. Let's use them each day and cry out to a God who loves all his children equally. Let's pray these prayers every day of the conflict and in particular during Lent.

Now there is no Lent as such in the Bible. Jesus hasn't commanded us to spend our next forty days in preparation for Easter in a desert. What Lent does do is give us a chance to have a spiritual spring-clean, so to speak, and to understand more fully God's saving plan for us. God makes his presence known to us in so many different ways - some more profound than others. A simple act of kindness, maybe being offered the first pancake, beauty in nature, answered prayer and grace when we least expect it, all tell us about God and our response to knowing we are loved.

The disciples in our gospel reading were sleepy, but they woke fully to Jesus' glory. Their faith was surely strengthened by this experience. Think about those things that are helpful to you on your faith journey. We need all the help we can get to live the Christian life. It's costly and more demanding than we first imagined, but faith tells us that the reward is greater and fuller than we can ever imagine. Amen.