

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023.  
St John's and Christ the King.

### The Transfiguration

Exodus 24:12-18  
2 Peter 1: 16-18  
Matthew 17: 1-8

“Six days later...”

It had been a busy week for the disciples. Well, let's face it, it was always a busy week with Jesus. But this week had been busy *and* confusing.

It had all started with a question from Jesus. “Who do people say that I am?” So they had told him - that the word on the street was that he was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. No-one really knew, beyond that he was doing remarkable things so must be someone special.

And then Jesus had gone right to the heart of the matter. “Who do you say I am?”

And quick as a flash, Peter – it had to be Peter didn't it – had blurted out, “You are the Messiah.”

And then all sorts of confusion had broken out. Jesus had started talking about loads of weird stuff.

Like that he was going to go to Jerusalem – (Why, Jesus?)

.....and that there would be suffering and death – (No, Jesus, no. That's not the script)

.....and that his followers need to take up their cross – eugh – and follow him. (Er – that's definitely not the script)

.....and that if they lost their life for his sake they would find it. (So what does that even mean?)

To be honest it had been Too. Much. Information. And they had all been relieved when at the end of the week Jesus had said to Peter, James and John, “Let's go up the mountain” – the three because they fancied a nice walk in the hills with their mate – and the others because, really, they needed a day off.

And then *this* had happened.

And this had taken it all to a whole new level of weirdness.

I wonder if you have ever had the experience of seeing someone you think you know really well in a completely different light? Maybe encountering a friend when they are in a work situation, or a family member 'out' with people you don't know? I remember being totally taken aback when I asked for my son's opinion about how to deal with a work situation

which was very new to me, but which he handles all the time. My word! Such a different approach from what I would have expected!

I also recall when someone at church realised that I used a different surname at work. She was horrified. "But you can't be Kate Arnold – she's horrible and you're lovely." (Moral of tale, don't rely on other people's opinions!)

If none of these ring a bell, perhaps you are familiar with the optical illusion of the beautiful young woman and the old crone. Yes - they are the same picture, but we just see them in different ways.

Now, we can only take these analogies so far, but they illustrate a broad point. That we never see the entirety of one person – and that sometimes things happen which help us to see another aspect of who they are.

Peter, James and John thought they knew Jesus really well. He was their friend, their teacher, they were coming to realise that he might be the Messiah – but here they see him in a completely different light. They see his divinity – his God-ness – superimposed on his humanity.

They see that as well as friend, teacher, healer and miracle-worker, he actually is God – in power and majesty and light.

That in this terrifying event on this mountain there is a reflection of the time when God met with Moses on Mount Sinai, and gave him the Ten Commandments – the basis of the Jewish "Law". We heard some of that story in the OT passage this morning.

They see that Jesus is not confined by our understanding of time – there he is with Moses, (the representative of the Law) who had walked the earth about 1,500 years earlier and with Elijah (the representative of the prophets) who lived around 875BC.

And that he knows them both well.

For a brief moment, the boundary between heaven and earth parts just enough for them to get a glimpse of the eternal Christ in his glory....

And enough for them to hear the voice saying "This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him."

Listen to him.

There Jesus is with Moses and Elijah, and God says – "Listen to him. Yes, Moses and Elijah are part of the story, but now listen to **him**. He has the words of eternal life...."

No wonder Peter blurts out nonsense about building shelters. No wonder they fall to the ground in fear. No wonder they, and we, find it hard to comprehend.

So – what *do* we make of this story?

Some might say that it's just one of those weird things that seemed to happen around Jesus and the early church, but is now safely consigned to history. Others might respond that they have experienced times when the veil between heaven and earth became very thin, and they caught a glimpse of glory.

Whether we do, or we don't, I'd like to suggest that there are at least two things we can take away from the story

First- that however dear, long-held, and comforting our "picture" of Jesus is, it is **not** the whole, entire and final story.

The writers Beth and David Booram express it like this

"our image of God is not God, but more accurately, the God of our present understanding."

In other words, our image of God is shaped by what we have been told about God, how we have experienced God up to this point in our lives. But it's not the entirety of God. God is always immeasurably bigger than our limited human understanding can ever be. And as we grow in our faith and experience, it's healthy that our image of God should expand.

Peter, James and John had lived, breathed, walked and slept alongside Jesus for months. They had watched him, listened to him, learned from him and been challenged by him – but when they went up the mountain with him that day they saw an aspect of him that literally knocked them off their feet.

Yes, Jesus is our friend, our comforter, our healer, the one we turn to when things are tough. But that is not all he is. There is always more of God for us to discover – and not just for us to observe, but for us to respond to, and to offer ourselves back to.

And secondly, God says of Jesus "Listen to him." *Listen* to him. Not just "hear" him, but actively *listen* to him.

Let's be honest – how often do we really do that? Stop the endless list of requests in our prayers?

Yes, they are important, and God invites us to bring them to him - but they are not all that prayer is about. Stop asking and just wait, expectantly. Maybe read a passage of the Bible and allow the Spirit to speak to us through that<sup>1</sup>.

But listen.

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<sup>1</sup> This way of reading the Bible is called Lectio Divina, and you can find out more about it here [https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/prayer\\_course/2019/resources/pdfs/21%20How%20to%20do%20the%20Lectio%20Divina.pdf](https://downloads.24-7prayer.com/prayer_course/2019/resources/pdfs/21%20How%20to%20do%20the%20Lectio%20Divina.pdf)

We started by observing that “It had been a busy week for the disciples.” I think it’s fair to say that this story tells of a life-changing day for Peter, James and John – the way Peter wrote about it many years later in the letter we heard this morning demonstrates that. It fundamentally changed his understanding of who Jesus is – even if maybe he didn’t fully realise it until after the resurrection...

“We made known to you the *power* and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,... we had been *eyewitnesses* of his *majesty*. For he received *honour* and *glory* from God the Father when the voice came to him from the *Majestic Glory*...”

Not merely human, but also divine  
Not just their friend, but Lord of all eternity  
Not just what they could see and hear, but infinitely more

So what about us?  
How do we feel about being open to experiencing more of God?  
About listening to Jesus, and acting on what we hear?

And if we do, I guess the question is, will we allow it to change our lives too?