

Transfigured

Do you ever wonder, where on earth or in heaven above is God: I am a good person, I try to love my neighbour, I go to church, I recycle... and still this is happening to me!

I am guessing that very few people failed to notice the weather this past week. We had one of the coldest nights in parts of Scotland in 60 years, we even got a picture of the country turned white, from NASA. We had deep snow, and disruption all around. It was beautiful to look at, my dog was beside himself with glee, and for me at least it offered a rare chance to speak to my neighbours as we each cleared our drives. Undoubtedly it was enjoyed by children, families and dogs all over the country. My enjoyment of it, however, came to an end relatively quickly.

On Thursday, I successfully left my house drove through the city to conduct a funeral and almost made it home without incident. When I was twenty feet from my house, though, my problems started. I pulled into my cul-de-sac, drove a little bit and my car started to spin. I did all the tricks I learned growing up in the country to get it moving again, but to no avail. 10 minutes of manoeuvring, back a little bit, forward a little bit, until eventually it moved, and I made it into my drive and home safe. I was, however, mortified. Many of you will have seen videos of people spinning in snow, being laughed at from a watching neighbour, well now, for all I know, I have become one of those people.

It was in the middle of all this, as panic, worry, and embarrassment started to set in that I had my 'where on earth or heaven above is God,' moment. 'Why is this happening to me? I was so close to making it home, I had seen others come and go with no problems. Why me?'

Now I know my story is trivial, but many will be thinking of a time that was much more significant, or painful, or important and wondering to themselves 'where is God in my life?' 'Why can't I see the way forward or through these problems?'

This morning's reading from Mark's Gospel is the story of the Transfiguration. One of the few that comes up every year in the Sunday readings that we use. And though we have it

every year, and though the story is most likely familiar to a lot of us, it remains a difficult one to embrace in the same way we do with Christmas or Easter.

Nevertheless, it is one that can speak clearly into our lives and our understanding of God.

It tells us about Jesus and Peter, James, and John, ascending a mountain, and when there Jesus is transfigured, and in a nod to Jesus' position alongside of the law and the prophets,¹ Moses and Elijah appear beside him in this new state, and after all of these amazing things, God speaks. It is little wonder that Peter and the disciples are dumbfounded.

It is important to recognise, before we go further, that while many might see the word 'Transfiguration,' as synonymous with transform, this is not the case. There is an important distinction. When Jesus is transfigured, he is not fundamentally changed, he remains the same person, it is how the people who were with him and by extension us, see him, that changes. And it is for this reason that the imagery of this story itself is worth focusing on.

This story is, among other things, a reminder that God is faithful. Before us is the long history of our faith and our relationship with God, from Moses, to Elijah, to Jesus, to the Disciples, to the Evangelists, to us. We are beloved and God is telling us, showing us, that we are with God always. In this story of transfiguration, we are given a new perspective, we see Jesus, not a different Jesus, but him as he truly is, the man known to the disciples, the fulfilment of the law and the prophets, and the beloved Son of God. We are given the opportunity to change our perspective.

Jesus hasn't fundamentally changed – how we see him, how we know him – has changed. So instead of thinking of the Transfiguration as Jesus having changed, maybe we would do better to focus on the potential for change in ourselves, our change of perspective.

These last eleven months have been difficult, each one of us will have been impacted by COVID, some may have had it, or lost loved ones to it, some may have seen their finances

¹ Stanley P. Saunders, "Exegetical Perspective" in *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1*, p.455.

impacted, or work in health care and feel the weight of the world on their shoulders, some may be lonely, or depressed, or seeking change in a life that seems to have become formulaic. Some may be crying out: where on earth or in heaven above, is God?

It is for moments such as these that this story, the Transfiguration, is there for. It is a moment of revelation.² It is there to remind us that we are part of this long and complicated story, Jesus is with us, God loves us, we are never alone.

When I was having my, admittedly frivolous, outburst spurred on by embarrassment, questioning why God would let this happen to me, in that moment, the fact that I managed to get out of the house, drive up and down streets covered in snow with no problems whatsoever, safe and sound, and almost make it home, went completely out of my head: I wasn't thinking about God when everything was going well.

And that's okay, most of the time we turn to God in our pain or struggle, we seek comfort, reassurance and love from God. But how would our lives be changed if we tried to embrace God in the good times too? What would our lives be like if instead of only seeing the absence of God, we looked for the glory in our everyday lives? If we welcomed the revelation of the Transfiguration? If we had a change of perspective? This wouldn't remove or ignore the darkness, but it would acknowledge that it is never the whole story.

Maybe we need to spend some time asking ourselves – when are those moments that we can see God with us? When can we say, like Peter before us: 'it is well that we are here!' because it is hard: it is easy to blame, it is much harder to seek out things to be thankful for.

And this goes beyond our relationship with God, it extends to all interactions in our lives. This is a frustrating time, but there are still moments when we can see the glory of God or how it may be reflected in the world all around us.

There are places, there are times, when a change of perspective will let us see this.

² Pheme Perkins, "Mark", in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume VII*, pp.476-478.

Even in the seemingly small things:

We can see people offering to clear a pathway of snow;

We can see people offering to pick up groceries for the housebound;

We can see people making a point of calling the person they know needs to hear another voice;

We can see people taking a moment to try to see the good in another, instead of the bad.

With a change of perspective, we can see the good in the world, even in the dark times, where, as Paul tells us in our first reading: 'the light will shine out of the darkness.'

Sometimes we have to work to see these things, but the reward is a life lived basking in the glory and love of God, when we can say 'it is well that we are here' to see it.

In this complicated, often difficult world, there will always be good and bad, there will always be happiness and sadness, but it would be a mistake to only see God in the bad times. Though comfort will certainly come in these times from the God who not only loves the Son, Jesus, but the one who has declared each and every one of us as beloved children too.

Like this story of the Transfiguration, God is in the world, giving us signs, showing us support, trying to enter into our lives and reminding us that we are loved, we are never forgotten, nevertheless, maybe we get in our own way, maybe we miss the good things that are all around us – even in the midst of the darkness. So, this week, instead of asking why God is not there why don't we search for those places and times where God is, the good, not just the bad, why don't we work for a change of perspective and seek out those times we can say with all our hearts 'it is well that we are here,' for God is with us through it all.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

Amen.