

**Transfiguration Sunday****Changing**

*II Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9*

Every one of us needs a mountain where we can climb above the struggles of the world to gain new perspectives on life. From our mountaintop we recognize our fragility and vulnerability and see the world a bit more as God sees it. Perhaps we discover a sense of compassion for ourselves, or for people around us, and maybe even creation itself. Perhaps, where the air is clearer and purer, we find ourselves lifted above the clouds of conflict, or weariness, or pain, or even despair.

The Mountain of Transfiguration is a real place. It is likely to be Mount Tabor, nearly 1,900 feet high. It is about 11 miles from the Sea of Galilee and not too far from Nazareth. It is shaped almost like half a sphere and is situated on the ancient Via Maris which connected the coast to cities like Damascus. In the flat plain, it was of significant strategic importance. In ancient Israelite times beacons would be lit to inform nearby villages of holy festival days and the beginning of a new month.

The transfiguration of Jesus lifts the veil between one reality and another. It is a moment of revelation, where we are challenged to see Jesus in another way. Not just as the teacher and healer from Galilee, but as the Son of God, the Messiah, the shining One Whose mission is to save the world, the women and men and children, and all Creation. To transform things, and to change things for the better.

When we read about this story of transfiguration, we are on the borders between heaven and earth, and that can be disorienting as well as revealing. This story lies halfway through Mark's Gospel, between Jesus' baptism and His resurrection. The voice from heaven tells the disciples to,

"...listen to Him..." In this story does something change about Jesus? I'm not sure. Is something meant to change in the disciples of Jesus? I think that's what this story is pointing toward.

Everything in this moment – Jesus seen in a different light, the appearance of Moses the law-giver and Elijah the pre-eminent prophet, the babbling of Peter attempting to be useful (let's build shelters for the three figures, in case it rains on them on the mountain-top, or something like that!) leads up to the moment when God speaks from the cloud of mystery, overshadowing them all, naming Jesus as His Son, His beloved, to Whom we should listen.

Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah, us. On the mountaintop, listening to what Jesus has to say. This shining figure, with the ability to change us. This Sun beyond all suns, not simply illuminating Himself, but illuminating the world, so that because of His brightness, we see Him, and His world, and ourselves, in a true light.

We are all changed, or maybe better, we are all changing. If our lived-out Christian faith means anything, not just how we express it in our daily living, but what we believe about God, and Jesus, I think we become very aware about this changing process. The more we listen to what Jesus has to say, the more we wrestle with what that might mean, the easy and the difficult, the more we continue that process of changing.

If we take to heart what Jesus says to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, body and soul, what does that mean for us? What kind of difference does it make to the way we live our lives, the choices we make, the things we say, the way we behave? If we take to heart what Jesus says when He tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves, what does that mean for us? What kind of difference does it make to the way we live our lives, the choices we make, the things we say, the way we behave?

On the mountain of transfiguration I don't know that it is Jesus Who is changed; rather it is the people who see Him, and listen to Him. As He is revealed, as He is seen and heard, so in the reflected light we see ourselves as we are and what we might yet become, and we respond to God Who tells us to listen to Jesus. I wonder if in this changing of who and what we are something is meant to shift and alter in the way we live? If what we believe has no practical effect on how we live, then what is the point of our Christianity? If God is calling us to make a difference in the world, might it not be that alongside this we are called to make a difference in ourselves?

I think that's part of the point of this mountaintop experience. Away from the noise and bustle, away from the frustrations and busy-ness, away from the distractions and the worries, there is this moment, in fact, there will be these moments, when light comes, and sound follows, and we see and hear something in a new way, that makes an essential difference to us. We enter the process of changing.

Even on the mountaintop there is also a cloud. It is such a powerful image to which most of us can relate. The life of faith can feel like travelling in a cloud. Maybe for you there is a lot less clarity about faith than you might like. You are left with questions, uncertainty, what is the way ahead, what am I supposed to believe, and what kind of difference is it supposed to make to my living? Does that ring true for you? Those moments of doubt.

In this story, even in the cloud, whether the brightness lasts or is diffused, one thing sings out: God is still there. When those doubts and fears and worries come, when we struggle to live up to what we believe are our Christian ideals, God is still speaking, and God is saying, "Here is my Son, my beloved, listen to Him."

After the brightness on the mountaintop, revealing Jesus, revealing us; after the cloud on the mountaintop, recognizing that even with faith, doubts are real; we come down from the mountain.

We will always need mountains to give us perspective and a vision of a far horizon, but we are not meant or created to stay up there. We will all have had those mountaintop experiences when God, or the purpose of our lives, or the decisions we need to make, or the direction we are meant to travel, or the changes we need to effect, are very real to us. But for any of that to take a hold, we also need to take that long trek down the mountain and back into the everyday world.

Down the mountain they go, Jesus and the disciples. Having seen and experienced something. An understanding of the past, a revelation of the present, maybe even the briefest of glimpses of the future, which for Jesus would lead to His death on the cross, and then a resurrection life beyond to inspire and challenge His followers in every generation.

Fortified and puzzled, down the disciples go, back into life on the ground; amidst the noise and the mess and the hopefulness and the uncertainties, but able to recall a moment when they saw something of what God was like, and they caught a glimpse of themselves, the good and the bad, in that reflected light. And they heard something of God speaking into their hearts, telling them to listen, then propelled them with that awareness back into the everyday world where what they have learned, and what they worked to change, would make some kind of difference.

What does this story about changing and perspective and vision and faith and doubt have to say to us today?

Perhaps think about your mountaintop experiences. What have you seen, what do you need to do, what do you need to become? Perhaps think about the cloud of doubt and belief that swirls around you. What do you need to make sense of when it comes to how you relate to Jesus on your own personal spiritual journey? What is God saying to you today?

Perhaps think about the world in which you live. What new imagination, new ways and change need to come into being in politics, in education, in the work of charities, in the way we do business, and how might you play your part in all of that?

Perhaps think about the up and down nature of your life so far. Those moments of utter joy. Those moments of dark despair? Those moments of long, hard slogging, those exams in the not too distant future; those decisions at work; working out the future of our Church.

Transfiguration: those times of changing in our everyday lives – high on the mountain, down in the everyday world. And at each step along the way, whether in brightness or in cloud, God. God. God.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**