

**St Brandon's      11 Feb 24, Sunday next before Lent**

**2Cor 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9**

## **SERMON**

We were up in Scotland in February once when it snowed, quite heavily one night. We awoke to white-capped hills and clear blue skies. The friends who were with us decided to climb a mountain, whilst we, with a then elderly dog as our excuse, settled for a walk on the beach.

Well, thanks to smartphones and their cameras, we could enjoy updates and stunning mountain-top views, and that evening we heard detailed accounts of the walk up and back, who they'd met and what they'd seen... Such bright fresh snow, possibly the whitest, brightest sight on earth...

Today we remember another mountain- top experience, the Transfiguration. A word rarely found outside of church, **Transfiguration**, is defined as ***a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state: (repeat)***

In the Orthodox church, this is one of the 12 major festivals in the church year, and it's often depicted in icons, although hardly ever in western religious art.

An icon isn't meant to be a true likeness to look *at*, but an image you look *into*, which draws you close to the *experience* of being there. So icons of the Transfiguration depict the *glory* which surrounded and changed Jesus, Moses and Elijah and the light, the golden aura of how it might have looked and felt, as well as a trio of confused and stumbling disciples looking up at them.

Michael Ramsey commented:

*While Western Christians have asked what moral and practical lessons are to be learnt from the event, the East has often been content simply to rejoice in the glory which Mount Tabor sheds upon Christ, the Christian church and all creation.*

Or in other words, we in the west have tended to view the Transfiguration as something to be explained, while the Eastern church sees it as something to be experienced.

*Perhaps we can do a bit of each today.*

It's likely that Mark heard about the mountain top experience he recounts in today's gospel from Peter himself. Much of Mark's source material for his gospel, which we're reading through this year, is thought to have come from Peter.

It's just a few days since Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asks him, 'Who do you say that I am?' and he replies, 'You are the Messiah.'

Peter has begun to grasp, through what he has seen and heard, that Jesus really is the Christ, the promised leader who will save God's people. And typically, he blurts it out, straight from the heart. Now, on the mountain top, he has the opportunity both to understand and experience a bit more. So we read this account in the context of what Peter came out with at Caesarea Philippi, recorded just half a chapter earlier.

This is the hinge point in Mark's gospel- from now on everything points to Jerusalem and the cross, both in Jesus' teaching and their physical journey.

Along the way, Jesus will prepare his disciples for what's to come, what being the Messiah entails, for his passion and death.

Peter will refuse to accept this on several occasions, and will even deny he knows Jesus, which makes us wonder,

### **How can Peter have experienced the Transfiguration and later rejected Jesus in this way?**

Well, at the time, Jesus tells Peter James and John not to say anything, until after the resurrection- which I think is more about understanding what they've experienced than keeping a secret. It's only after the resurrection that the vision they saw and the words they heard will make any real sense to them.

But of course the experience will stay with them forever.

And as Jesus predicted, Peter only begins to live in the full understanding of who Jesus is *after* the resurrection and *after* he receives the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

However much Peter falters after his mountain -top experience, he never forgets it; instead it became the bedrock of his faith... in the second letter of Peter we read this:

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been*

*eyewitnesses of his majesty..... We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1 18*

Peter's unforgettable experience that day is an encounter with Jesus God and Man. He sees him transformed, dazzling in light as the glory of God shines out from him. He sees Moses and Elijah with him, symbolising the Law and the Prophets, twin pillars of Peter's Jewish faith, with Jesus in the centre, the fulfilment of all the Hebrew Scriptures promised. Peter wants to capture the moment, to build them booths, as at the feast of tabernacles, to do something practical in response to the awesome majesty he is seeing...

Instead the *shekinah* cloud of God's glory covers them, the Father speaks and Peter *knows* that Jesus is the Son of God.

And then he walks back down the mountain with Jesus the Man, embarking on the journey that will take him to the cross. The paradox is beyond Peter's comprehension, that the Most High should become servant of all, that Light should choose darkness, that the author of all life should give his life for all.

Until, after the resurrection, and when the Spirit comes at Pentecost, Peter's experience and understanding, sight and insight, combine to transform his whole life and through him, many other people's lives.

As we ponder this, I'd like to read you a poem by Ann Lewin entitled Transfiguration, followed by some brief closing thoughts.

*A moment of blinding perception –  
It would be good to stay there –  
But clutch it, and it's gone.  
They come unheralded,  
Those moments of dazzling clarity,  
And leave us as suddenly.  
As well try catch the kingfisher  
Darting through stillness.*

*Be thankful for its jewelled beauty,  
And keep awake, keep alert.*

### *SILENCE*

Finally, some thoughts to ponder and pray over this week:

In your own faith, how much is experience and how much is explanation or understanding?

Is heart or head more important to you?

*Peter shows us that **both** matter, but only the Holy Spirit can bring them together for us, so we recognise and truly know God's presence in our lives.*

This Lent, over the next few weeks, as you reflect on your journey with God, do you want to grow in **experiencing** God, in **understanding** more, or both?!

Listen out for details in the notices about what is happening in Lent to support this as we travel together.

Lets pray.

Lord Jesus, God and Man, may we both experience and understand, more and more of who you are, and thus may our lives be filled with your light and love, to share with others.

Amen.