

14 February 2021

Sunday next before Lent

Gospel **Mark 9.2-9**

2Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection

The transfiguration is a powerful image that has a special meaning for me. On a pilgrimage to Russia, this icon was the one that really spoke to me, it appeared in every single church that we visited. I asked the leader why it was that in EVERY church the Transfiguration icon was present, he smiled and turned to the group and asked them what one icon they had seen in every church. Each person had a different answer! What I thought was the leading icon in the Russian churches which are filled with icons, was actually one of the many icons, but it was the one that spoke to me! And my life was about to change radically!

Rev'd Vanessa Cole writes this for the combination of Valentine's day and the Transfiguration: *Love 'lifts us up' according to the ballads and love songs. Love is where we find ourselves, our 'other halves' (a cliché that particularly riles me), home, heaven... Love is kind, love is gentle, love bears no record of wrongs, according to St Paul's Hymn to Love in 1 Corinthians 13.*

Today I want to think about how love transforms us. It has been said that every woman is beautiful on her wedding day. It is more than just the expensive dress and hours spent in the beautician's chair. The joy that emanates from a blushing bride as she basks in the love of her brand-new husband, would outshine the most lavishly dressed beauty queen. Love isn't just for newlyweds and love birds, or even for fortunate Valentines; the love that transforms, transcends the everyday is a gift from God for each and every one of us.

In this week's gospel passage Jesus himself is transformed by the Father's love. In a prophecy-fulfilling moment Jesus takes his closest disciples up a mountain, a high mountain Mark tells us, and as they reach the top something unbelievable happens: so unbelievable that Peter, James and John are told not to mention the incident to any of the others when they re-join them.

At the top of this mountain something quite literally awesome happens to Jesus: his clothes become dazzlingly white as he is 'transfigured'. The disciples' spiritual heroes stand alongside Jesus, despite being long gone. Peter is flustered and says too much, the others are silenced. The man before them is no longer their friend, their teacher, their rabbi... the humanity seems to fall from Jesus as his deity quite literally shines through.

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As wonder-ful as this moment is, there is more to come: the cloud of God's presence comes over them all and God the Father speaks the most treasured words any of us can ever hope to hear: This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!

Within each of us is a need to be loved. We can pretend that we are independent, that we don't care, that we are happy being single, but that doesn't mean that we don't also need to be loved. At this time of year, we can often confuse passion and lust with love, but as stirring as they can be they cannot replace the un-conditional love that God bestowed upon Jesus, and if we were only aware, has for us too.

The love that Father God bathed Jesus in on that mountainside quite clearly had a very physical impact upon him, but love goes deeper than the skin. When we come to God the Father and open our hearts to him, we too can bathe in that transformational love: Love that doesn't seek anything in return, love that doesn't have to be bought or earned, love that will not remove itself upon a whim. The love of God is love at its purest, its truest: love that sees us for who we are and who we can become with a little TLC.

If Valentine's day is making you feel less than lovely, then these words are for you: This is my child, the Beloved.

Our clothes may not become dazzling white, and we have no deity to shine through. It is highly unlikely that any prophets will appear alongside us. That doesn't mean that God can't transform us though. Throughout the Bible we hear the stories of people who were thought of as not just unlovable, but untouchable. As Jesus came near them, their outer shells fell away as the love transformed them into children of God.

As children of God, it is our inheritance to live in love, and to spread that love to others who are feeling unlovable. Jesus called his first disciples to love their neighbour, to love their enemies. This Valentines I hope and pray that you feel as beloved of God as did Jesus that moment on the mountainside, but also that you can share the love with those around you. Times are tough, many are feeling low and as if they are running on empty. Isolation and loneliness are the silent side effects of the pandemic, people need our love.

This Valentine's we have a new challenge: to reclaim the gift of love from the market place and do whatever we can to bathe our neighbourhoods and communities with God's abundant love."

Prayers by Helen Briggs Sunday 14th February, St Valentine's Day

For God so loVed the world that he gAve his onLy begottEn soN thaT whosoever believeth In him should Not perish but have Everlasting life

O Lord, the creator of the universe and author of the laws of nature, inspire in us your servants the will to ensure the survival of all the species of animals and plants, which you have given to share this planet with us. Help us to understand that we have a responsibility for them and that 'having dominion' does not mean that you have given us the right to

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exploit the living world without thought for the consequences. Through him who taught us that Solomon in all his glory could not compare with the beauty of the flowers of the field

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer*

As we continue to make our way through this challenging time, we pray for all parents, guardians and teachers who have the privilege and responsibility of nurturing the children and young adults of this world. May they be conscious of the task entrusted to them to enable each individual to grow and develop in mind, in body and in spirit. We pray that schools and colleges may soon resume their work and thus be enabled to encourage each young person to find the gifts that You have given them and work so that every home is touched by Christ

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer*

We pray for Vanda and Bob as they answer the call to journey north. We pray that the position that Vanda takes up will be well suited to her talents and that she may make a positive difference to the young people she comes across whose lives have been troubled. We pray for all in prison and especially for young offenders. Support them in their loneliness and need and grant them the vision of a new beginning and the courage to take it, and through the warmth of human friendship, strengthen their faith in your love and care

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer*

We pray for all those who are sick in hospital or at home, whether from Covid 19 or other reasons. And we pray for all those who have tirelessly striven to help them recover from illness or who have been at their side during their last moments. We ask your blessing and support for all those who have suffered bereavements and who find the future very bleak. We pray for all those suffering from loneliness, anxiety or mental health problems at this time.

Be with them all and help them to know that underneath are your everlasting arms.

Lord in your mercy *hear our prayer*

Words of comfort from St John's Gospel "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"

Merciful Father *accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ*

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