

THE TRANSFIGURATION Mark 9:2-9

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

BIBLE REFLECTION

Today is the Sunday before Lent. It is also Valentine’s Day. So it seems odd that the set gospel reading for the day is the story of the Transfiguration. We normally remember this story on the 6th of August every year. So why are we having this reading today? Well, I think it is because this is a turning point in the gospels. This is when Jesus turns his face towards Jerusalem and the cross, and this is when the disciples realise that Jesus really is the Messiah, the Son of God.

We read that Jesus takes 3 of his disciples – Peter, James & John - away from everyone else. They climb high up on a mountain to pray. Suddenly, Jesus’ face changes – Matthew said, “His face shone like the sun”. His clothes change also – Mark says, “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” Luke says “His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.” Have you ever been looking out of a window in the middle of a thunderstorm when lightning hits nearby and just lights everything up like daylight? That is what Luke says it was like!!! AWESOME.

But that wasn’t all that happened. Then 2 other figures appeared – Elijah and Moses. Then as the disciples watched, a cloud appeared and enveloped them. The cloud shone brightly and from it a voice came – the voice of God, saying “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Then the cloud and Moses and Elijah disappeared, and the disciples were left with Jesus. Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

What an awesome event – nothing like the disciples had ever seen before.

The transfiguration was the watershed when Jesus began to speak openly about his death. This would have shocked the disciples and shaken their confidence in him as Messiah.

But in the transfiguration, they see that even with an imminent death looming, Jesus is glorified. Death is a key theme and Jesus was keen for these three disciples to understand that death was not the end of things. It was the beginning. These three were privileged to catch a glimpse of who Jesus really was, and it left an indelible mark on them. It TRANSFORMED them.

Remember that Jesus was calling them to a hard life where they would have to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. We also need to be transformed like they were. That occurs when we see a glimpse of the real Jesus. The one who was God, who gave up all his rights and powers and became a helpless baby, who would grow up and give his life for us. When we grasp some of the awesomeness of Jesus, we too, will be radically changed, like the disciples who went from plain old fishermen to defenders of the faith.

This glimpse of Jesus at the transfiguration is a glimpse of his real self – a sneak peak at Jesus who is God. Jesus wasn't just a man who did some pretty incredible miracles. He was GOD. And that night Moses and Elijah pointed to it, and the disciples saw it.

Sometimes I don't think we recognise the fact that Jesus is God. We see him more as a human being and forget completely that He was 100% God, with all the power, majesty and might of God who created this world. While I think we can have a go at imagining what it cost Jesus to give his life on the cross, I don't think we even come close to imagining what it cost Jesus to give up his power and majesty and take the form of a man.

Jesus gave up his power and majesty because he loves you and me. He died on the cross, because he loves you, and me! I struggle to get my head around that. What kind of love is that? Totally unconditional. Total overwhelming love.

In John's gospel we read that Jesus said to his disciples: 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' (John 15:12-13).

In our English language we use the word '**love**' a lot. You know, I love chocolate, I love my sister, I love watching football, I love helping out at the Foodbank, I love my wife...

These all pale into insignificance compared to the love that God has for each one of us. God wants us to love him, to love each other, and to love his creation, in the same way. This love should be unconditional, and total. We will need to be transformed to do this, and that can only happen when we love God with our whole being – heart, mind and soul.

This Wednesday, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Maybe you are thinking of giving up chocolate, or cake, or alcohol for Lent. How about giving up some time to help other people. Nobody loves you as much as God does. Jesus told his disciples, and us, to 'love one another'. Jesus wants us to have an unselfish love for others – love that expects nothing in return. We are also called to care for God's creation.

So the question is: 'How much do you love God?' Are you willing to let him transform your life so that you can share God's love with others, and are you willing to change your lifestyle to help reduce climate change?

Of course, at this moment, with the coronavirus pandemic, it might be difficult for you to get out and help someone. However, there are many ways that we can offer help. Maybe you could write someone a letter, or a card, or give someone a telephone call. Maybe you could ask your neighbours if they need you to do any shopping for them. Could you support a charity, or mission agency, or your church financially? Ask God to show you someone who needs your help.

Let us pray.

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,
The love You are asking today.
Then help us to love one another;
For this we most earnestly pray. Amen.