

Sunday 6th August 2023 Trinity 9 - Patronal Benefice HC;
Oswaldkirk

When you look at yourself in the mirror do you think ‘what a beautiful sight!’? I am not sure I do...!! As you persevere with the morning ablutions; shave, make up do you look again and think – ‘transfiguration’? Probably not. Nevertheless, we endeavour to make ourselves more beautiful, our clothes, our hair our appearance.

Beauty is an interesting concept. We tend to see it as something confined to our outward appearance; superficial, temporary, something sensory that we see or hear, or touch. In our Gospel reading today we learn of a different kind of beauty; what our hymn describes as the ‘beauty of holiness’ from the words of Psalm 96, “O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

The Hebrew word for “beauty” in this verse carries the idea of intrinsic beauty and worth, not something temporary, passing, or shallow. The “beauty of holiness” refers to an inner, constant, attractiveness that is “set-apart”. This is beauty that cannot be defined by appearance alone, it is something encountered and experienced, not defined by how we look, but by who we are. It’s more than words can describe and can often only be expressed by tears. I’m sure you’ve all had those times when the beauty of the moment fills your eyes with tears and all you can say is, “It’s just so beautiful.” These are Transfiguration moments; situations in which you experience and participate in beauty not so much with your mind but with your heart, times when the beautiful meets us and we know it intimately, not as an object but as a presence greater than ourselves. We are grasped and enfolded by the beauty, and it shapes and forms our lives leaving us forever changed. This is the transfiguration experience of those known to us as the ‘mystics’ who

encountered God in the most beautiful ways that changed and transformed or ‘transfigured’ their lives, in a beautiful and glorious way. The Greek word that describes transfiguration is ‘metamorphoo’ or what we call metamorphosis, the best example being a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. It means to change form into something glorious or beautiful, for a person, a church, or a society. As we remember St Oswald, under the guidance of St Aidan changed the people of Northumbria from pagan to Christian; as Bede records, “As soon as he became King, Oswald greatly wished that all the people whom he ruled should be imbued with the grace of the Christian faith.” in other words, transfigured.

We too can be aware of the presence of beauty in ourselves, each other, and the world. How could it be otherwise when one of the Hebrew names for God, is “The Beautiful One?” Why wouldn’t The Beautiful One make himself known and regularly invite us to participate in beauty? Holy Scripture tells us that the Creator looked at all creation and declared it to be “very good”, or in Hebrew, “beautiful”.

What does it say about us that we have been created in the image and likeness of The Beautiful One? It says we have been created with the eye for beauty, to see life, ourselves, and one another with the eye for beauty. This eye for beauty opens to us the transfiguring presence of God in every human being and in our world. Beauty connects us to our truest and most authentic self, and it is available to all who, like the disciples at the transfiguration of Jesus, keep awake.

The beauty of transfiguration has not and can never be lost. It doesn’t matter who you are, what you’ve done, or what your life is like. Human life and the world have already been transfigured by

the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's the power of beauty to change my life and yours and return us to the beauty that is our true self in Christ, made in the image of the Beautiful One. That's The Beautiful One healing, restoring, and making whole. That's the transfiguration in the flatlands of life, experiencing the 'beauty of holiness'.

The Transfiguration account tells us that in Christ, God's holiness is not a threat, but a cosmic thing of beauty. He loves us, he counts us already holy and without flaw in Christ, he is slowly cultivating in us a beautiful, lived holiness, and we can hardly imagine how beautiful we will be when we meet God in glory, except to trust that "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2). Our call, in the meantime, is to worship him in the beauty of his holiness and, astonishingly, in the beauty of our own holiness in Christ.

I want us to look in the mirror before we go to bed and see beauty. I want to call forth your beauty and I want you to do the same for me. I want us to look at the disfigured, broken, and hurting places of our lives and world trusting that beauty is present. So, let's keep awake, with an eye for beauty. Let's leave here today knowing that regardless of where we go, what happens, or who we meet, Beauty awaits us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.