

Sunday 2nd March 2025; Sunday next before Lent. BCP
Holy Communion, Stonegrave.

Today's gospel account, the Transfiguration, is one of those big stories from scripture, literally, a mountaintop experience.

For me it comes in the top events of Jesus's life after his birth, death, and resurrection. It is that important, but in the Western Church, I think it is played down, certainly compared to the Eastern Church which focuses much more on the post resurrection existence, what we all will become, and what that will be like.

I wonder then where that story fits in your life, does it even have a place and if so, how do you make sense of it? What does it mean for your life today? Perhaps it is such a significant event that it often feels a bit too fantastical, too unreal, and too far removed from real life to have any meaning for us. The temptation with these stories is either to try and rationalize, explain, and understand how it happened (or whether it even happened) or to chalk it up to a supernatural event about Jesus that could never happen in our lives.

That day for Peter, James, and John it did happen, and they saw everything in a new light. Although they wanted to somehow capture the moment, it was something they could not put into words or mentally take in. It was something they experienced beyond words. There are experiences in our lives too when light, beauty and ultimate reality appears to us, when everything feels just right, and we never want the moment to end. These are what have become known as 'mystical experiences' and have happened to countless people and can happen to you and me, if like the disciples, we stay awake, not in a physical way necessarily but certainly in a spiritual way.

If the first half of the Gospel today describes the glorious light of the Transfiguration, then the second half speaks about the greyness of disfiguration. Jesus, Peter, John, and James come down from the mountain and they meet a father who tells them about an unclean spirit that had seized his only son, convulses him until he foams at the mouth, and mauls him. In an extreme and tragic way, the lives of this father and son have been disfigured, until they encounter Jesus.

To be disfigured is not just a physical thing, it can happen in every aspect of our being. As you look at your life today you will see disfiguration. These can be times when there is no light or vibrancy and each day is just another shade of grey when you feel stuck, overwhelmed, or powerless to make a difference, when you feel disfigured. However, the greyness of life isn't necessarily bad or wrong, it can remind us that there is something else, something more, like the father of that child in the Gospel, it can tell us we need Jesus. It can be a calling or an invitation to a larger life, to a life, flooded with light as the grey is transfigured by Jesus's presence before us.

We are told in the Gospel reading that Peter, James and John are "weighed down with sleep." but because they stayed awake, they saw the Light of Christ. The struggle in our lives then is not so much between the "bursts of light" and the season of grey, it is between what weighs us down preventing us from staying awake to see the light. There are a thousand different things that weigh us down: fear, exhaustion, busyness, distraction, boredom, avoiding doing the same old things. But, regardless of what is weighing us down we must stay awake and not miss the light and experience it.

The Transfiguration revealed who Jesus was, who was born, lived among people, suffered, and died, and Jesus the Christ, who arose from the dead, and ascended as Lord of Heaven and Earth, human and divine in one person. In Christian teaching, the Transfiguration is therefore a pivotal moment, and the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place for the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. That's why it is important. But also in the same way, there is more to who you and I than the person we might think we have become. There is for each of us more of our true selves waiting to be revealed by the light of Christ, hope amid despair, meaning amid suffering, courage amid fear, peace amid chaos, life amid death. In every season of grey, there will be a transfiguration light giving hope, offering insight and illumination, and pointing the way, as Jesus did so powerfully that day to those tired disciples and that despairing father with his stricken child. All we need to do is to spiritually stay awake, and that is our task as we enter Lent again this week.

Thanks be to God. Amen.