

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

In this week before the Lenten journey starts, we move to the mountain-top to revisit the Transfiguration. This is another one of those stories which we know so well that we can easily slip into a 'same old, same old' way of thinking. But, there are some wonderful insights in Matthew's account, especially when linked with the Old Testament reading; particularly the focus on God's affirmation – of Christ, of God's called ones, and of us as followers of Christ.

Jesus' ministry is touched at two significant moments by God's glory and God's voice. The first was at his baptism as he started his ministry. The second is here at the transfiguration. In the first three Gospels this visitation of God comes as Jesus turns toward Jerusalem and his coming sacrifice, and it serves to affirm and strengthen him for the ordeal ahead. But it was also an important moment of preparation and reassurance for the disciples.

That day was different from any other day. That day was different for Peter, James, and John. That day was different for Moses. That day — the day they experienced the magnificent glory of the Lord.

Moses went up on the mountaintop. Moses saw the glory of the Lord face to face. The Lord, though, didn't want him to stay there. The Lord etched out on tablets of stones the way Moses and the people of Israel could reflect the glory of the Lord on earth. So Moses witnessed the glory of the Lord, but then he went back down the mountain. Surely Moses wanted to stay in the safety of the direct presence of God forever. But his calling was to share that experience with Israel and help Israel reflect God's glory to the world.

Peter, James, and John thought something was different about this particular request from Jesus. Perhaps there was something in his voice, a passion, a new note of hope, a longing in his eyes. They were curious as they went up the mountain with him. Then they too witnessed the glory of the Lord. We know that Peter wanted to stay on the mountain. But his calling was to take that confirmed prophetic message and move into the dark places.

The heart of these transfiguration readings is God's affirmation – especially of Christ. In Exodus, Moses is called to meet with God on the mountain to receive God's commands, affirming the leadership and ministry of Moses. These passages serve draw our attention to God's voice speaking from out of the cloud

and affirming Christ, as well as to the affirmation of Moses and Elijah in their appearance to Christ in this event.

Since God saw fit to affirm Christ in this way, it raises the question of what that means for us. First of all, it must challenge us to reflect again on our view of Christ. It must make us think again about the way in which we believe God's affirmation and act on it in our response to Christ. Secondly, God's affirmation of Christ, must become the basis on which we trust and adopt Christ's way of living. This moment, placed before Christ turns toward his death, was intended to affirm again that his way of sacrifice is God's chosen way. This was an assurance for the disciples, who faced deep doubt in the face of Christ's death, but is also an affirmation for us as we face times when Christ's way appears to be "failing" or costing us too much, or doesn't make sense.

As we reflect on this account, our task is to recognise the way God's glory is revealed in Jesus – not just in his miracles and resurrection, but also in his sacrificial death. We can take comfort in God's affirmation of Jesus because it reveals something of God's heart. We all face times of struggle, suffering and sacrifice, and it's tempting in those times to feel that God has either abandoned us or is punishing us. But, God's promise to us is the same as God's promise to Jesus – in our suffering God's glory can be revealed, and we can experience a deeper sense of God's presence and affirmation. We only need to recognise that God is with us, and that in, our suffering, God still seeks to reveal God's glory through us.

Of course, this work of affirmation is also something that must happen within our churches. Relationships, connectedness and community are built through celebrating one another and affirming one another. It is as we recognise the image of God within each other, and enable each other to shine, as Christ did, that we each find our place in community and in the work of God that we are called to do. Then, as we gather for worship, we can come with the expectation of encountering the transfigured Christ – indeed of experiencing a kind of transfiguration for ourselves – as the light of Christ radiates from each of us. Such an encounter will inevitably change us, and then, we will find ourselves moving out into the world to recognise the Christ-light everywhere, to affirm all who we meet, and to draw all people into this affirming, Christ-revealing way of living.

We are called to experience the glory of the Lord in daily life. But if we do so in a shelter on the mountain, the valley stays dark. We have to take the glory of

the Lord back down the mountain with us, move boldly forward with our prophetic message confirmed, and deny the darkness with the strong presence of the light of God's glory. So let's experience God's glory in worship on the mountain, but also in reconciliation in the valley, in change in our community, in hope for the oppressed.

For us who seek to follow Jesus today, the transfiguration is an important moment in the Church Calendar. The season after the Epiphany, which we have just journeyed through, is "book-ended" by the two moments when Jesus sees God's glory and hears God's voice. This means that we have had a wonderful opportunity to see God's glory revealed in Jesus. It also means that, as we turn to the challenging and convicting season of Lent, we can hold in our hearts the memory of God's affirmation of Jesus, and allow this to sustain us as we embrace the transforming disciplines of this season.

This week as we meditate on the transfiguration and begin the Lenten journey, may we open ourselves to God's glory and affirmation, and prepare ourselves for the journey of repentance that leads us to the cross and beyond. In Jesus name, Amen.