

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
ZOOM: Service for Sunday 14th. February 2021; Transfiguration YearB

Introduction and Prayer – Martin

Good morning.

It's good to speak to you again.

"We are not all gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship."

- National Worship Team (Edited.).

Today we read about how three friends accompanied Jesus up a mountain, and had a mountain-top experience that gave a glimpse of the glory of God.

A Prayer:

Gracious God,

May your light shine in our eyes.

May your voice be in our words.

May your love open our hearts.

May your joy lighten our steps,

this day, and every day. Amen.

Hymn 448 Shine Jesus Shine

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Our God is the power that made, and makes, the cosmos, the force which drives all things, yet, in Jesus, he walked the earth as one of us.

The light of his love is shining; the shining Spirit of God welcomes us in love and gentleness. As we come into his nearer presence, may we be filled with his Spirit of love and care.

We bring thanks and praise to God that in his Son Jesus Christ, transfigured and transfiguring, he shows us the true nature of love.

We give thanks for all the glimpses of his radiance with which he blesses us: in stillness, in chaos; in our fears in the face of the Covid Pandemic; in the world around us; in one another.

May the strength of his gentleness sink deep within us;

the freshness of his timelessness inspire us,

and the wonder of his forgiving Spirit cleanse us from all our mistakes and misdeeds, and equip us to transform, and to be transformed.

Thus may our lives reflect the love we feel;

the love we would share and would proclaim.

In the Lord of Life, may we be changed, transfigured with Christ.

May we be the people he wants us to be.

Let our light shine before others so that they may see our good works

and give glory to our Father in heaven;

and may the time come when the whole earth will declare his power and his glory.

Let us pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Readings: (Maureen):

1st Reading: 2 Corinthians 4: 3-6 (NCV)

If the Good News that we preach is hidden, it is hidden only to those who are lost. The devil who rules this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They cannot see the light of the Good News—the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God. We do not preach about ourselves, but we preach that Jesus Christ is Lord and that we are your servants for Jesus. God once said, "Let the light shine out of the darkness!" This is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts by letting us know the glory of God that is in the face of Christ.

Hymn: Father God

Gospel Reading: Mark 9:2-9 (NRSVA): The Transfiguration

[Six days later], Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then 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.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Message:

Today we have Mark's version of the strange and wonderful story of the Transfiguration. Mark, Matthew and Luke all tell this story, so the writers must have considered it very important.

We read about the uncreated divine light shining from Jesus, about the presence of Elijah and Moses, and the fear, and almost comical reaction, of the apostles.

Then, of course, the voice from the cloud, declaring to the disciples the identity of Jesus, and commanding them to listen to him.

This is the last Sunday of Epiphany, the Church season that begins with the Incarnation and the celebration of God's presence with us. Just before the passage Maureen read, Mark tells us about Jesus predicting his death, and setting his face toward Jerusalem, where he will be betrayed, arrested, and crucified.

Next week we enter the season of Lent, the 40 days that prepare us as we journey together toward the remembrance of the cross and the celebration of the empty tomb, but, before that, we are here, in the light of God, on the mountain at the Transfiguration.

In a way, this looks towards the glory of the risen Jesus, a foretaste of the glory to come, but the transfiguration comes before we are told anything about the Resurrection, so the Transfiguration shows us that, even before these things, the Light of God has been shining into our world: *God is with us.*

We can never know exactly what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration.

My scientific education leads me to look at things in practical terms, and to evaluate them in terms of scientific knowledge and experience. But I happily admit that there are a lot of

experiences that can't be explained in these terms. There are places that have a special quality that is hard to describe: places that make you pause; that make you aware of another dimension: what Celtic Christianity calls "*thin places*" – places - and experiences – where the boundary between the everyday world and the spiritual world is very thin. Places where our hearts are opened; places, or occasions, where the veil lifts for a moment, and we become more intensely aware of the presence of God - the God all around us, and within us, the God, as Paul reminds us, "*in whom we live and move and have our being*".

Thin places can be real geographical places, and there are lots of them in Orkney. St Magnus Cathedral; some of the other churches; Orphir Kirk; places along the shore, or on the cliffs.

As Gerard Manley Hopkins says:

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

One theologian writes:

"The world is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time. God is everywhere, and in everything, and we cannot be without Him. It's impossible. The only thing is that we don't see it." (Thomas Merton)

Just occasionally we do "*see it*"¹

We *do* experience God shining through everything. I think that's what the three disciples experienced that day. Maybe you have had an experience like that, a time of heightened spiritual awareness.

Some people have 'mountain-top' or thin-place experiences, that transform their lives, but for many others, maybe most of us, God's presence comes in smaller and more subtle ways.

Why were Moses and Elijah there with Jesus? Because Moses is the representative of the Law, and Elijah represents the Prophets. The great Lawgiver, and the great Prophet testify to who Jesus is, as he stands with shining face and dazzling white clothes.

God used mountain tops and 'thin places' to speak to many of the great figures of the Bible. Maybe you can think of some more examples.

This transfiguring experience of Jesus was a preparation to set him on the way to Calvary. For Peter, James and John, the mountain-top experience, the thin-place experience, was meant to strengthen their faith. It is meant to strengthen ours too.

I have some special places that I think of as "thin places." Maybe you have too.

If you have, I encourage you to use them, and, if you don't have them, why not search them out for yourself?

If we recognise the truth that God is everywhere, then we don't need to climb a mountain or do anything special. We can meet God anywhere.

What does all this mean for us today?

There is a lot about light and shining in today's readings.

Remember, Jesus said:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8: 12)

¹ (Borg, *Heart of Christianity*, 155).

In today's reading from 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us
"It is the God who said, *'Let light shine out of darkness'*, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

Paul is telling *us* that *we* are the bearers of the divine light.
That Jesus shines in *our* hearts, giving light and reflecting the glory of God from within *us*.
Think of that! We are bearers of the divine light that is the knowledge of Jesus.

Jesus himself said,
"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven".

The take home message today?
Several – but one in particular: the voice from the cloud.
Every one of us is called to do what the voice from the cloud said:
"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!".

Maybe, as we listen, the glory of God will come upon us unawares, as it did for the disciples, and strengthen us for the road ahead.
The hearts, the lives – maybe even the faces – of those who hear these words, and obey them, will be transformed - whether they realise it or not!
Amen. SDG.

Hymn: 543 Longing for Light

Prayer for Others and Blessing

'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'.

The heavens and the earth witness to the transforming power of God, and we bring thanks.

We bring into God's presence those places and those situations that we long to see changed, and transformed for his glory.

We pray for all those who are in any way affected by the Pandemic.
Especially we pray for those many countries where this awful disease comes on top of war, or brings additional misery to refugees desperately searching for safety and security, and to those denied so many of the basic necessities of life that we take for granted: food, wholesome water, medical care.

We pray for the poor in our own country, and our own community;
for people everywhere who have lost jobs or businesses to the Pandemic:
who are unable to work, or have to balance job against child-care.

We pray for those who offer support: for doctors, nurses and carers,
often working under intense pressure at this time;
for children and older students who see their education disrupted.

We pray for our nation, and for our governments in Westminster and in Edinburgh:
for those with political power,
all who have to make difficult decisions for the management of the disease.
We pray for those who have asked for our prayers,
and for those known to us who need our prayers:
for those who are ill, at home, or in hospital or hospice,
especially people suffering from Covid-19.

We pray for those worried or anxious, or sad;
for the very young, and the very old,
and for those who are alone, isolated by the restrictions, longing for human contact;
those who have lost their way.

In a moment of quietness, we bring before God
our own families and friends, and all those people, and all those concerns,
that weigh most heavily in our hearts today.

Pause

Loving God,
I breathe in your calm.
I breathe out my worries.
Holy Spirit, fill my life.
Holy Spirit fill my world.

And so we pray for ourselves, for our own journey of discipleship,
for courage, for steadfast faith, and wisdom in all we do or say.
Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ, the Lord of light.
Go in his name, to bring his glory into our world.
May we shine with the joy, peace and hope of his Holy Spirit,
that people may see in us the face and glory of Jesus Christ.
And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you, now and always. Amen.