

## Last Sunday after Epiphany – The Transfiguration Mark 9:2-9

Year after year the miracle of nature moving through her seasons and how it all happens over time never ceases to amaze us. For the longest time it seems like we are seeing no change and then suddenly we notice all that has happened, it can also feel like that through lent, that Easter is a long time coming and then suddenly upon us. Over the course of a year 6 weeks is no time at all but each lent those 6 weeks seem to cover so much in learning that they take an age to pass. Of course, it doesn't help if you are really missing that which you have given up – that always makes time drag too. But here we are on Transfiguration Sunday, and the Lenten stretch is about to begin. The seasons of Christmas and epiphany are behind us, colours will change with our mood in worship and we will become focused on Jesus' road to Calvary.

It's time to get serious, time to prepare ourselves for the worst time in the Christian year and the very best of times. It's time to decide how we will be disciplined this year in terms of giving up something or taking on more, and how we can use that discipline for the benefit of God's mission. It is time to get ready to face the reality of what our Lord came to do for us and what he endured. How painful it is to hear each year how our Lord suffered yet how wonderful to share the joy of his resurrection. Each year we are faced with this paradox. Holy week is so emotionally tiring, hearing about the arrest and the humiliation, the pain and the undignified death but we understand that without it there is no resurrection, no Christian hope.

Our gospel reading this morning contains within it the paradox of what is to come, although the disciples cannot understand it at the time, in the writing of the gospels the significance was not lost on them.

Just prior to the part we heard today the context of the story was this, Jesus explained what the world has in store for him. Telling his disciples that he must suffer many things and that he would suffer these things at the hands of the religious authorities and that he would die. He also told them that on the 3rd day he would rise but of course they don't really hear that part, they can't anticipate Jesus rising from the dead, even having seen his miracles, their faith doesn't stretch that far. They react as each of us would react if our friend and mentor told us that they were expecting bad times ahead. Peter, as usual, is the spokesman and he expresses his disbelief. I won't allow it, this is not going to happen, the echo of Peter's response is something we all recognise.

But then, 6 days later we are told that Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high place where they saw their lord transfigured – glowing bright white in glory and joined by Moses and Elijah and hearing the voice of God in a situation not unlike Jesus' baptism. Here the chosen 3 disciples catch a glimpse of the risen Christ, conqueror of death, the fulfilment of the law of Moses and the prophecies of Elijah and all the prophets of God and commended by God himself as his own son to be listened to and obeyed.

The story of the transfiguration seems like a miracle in and of itself. A proof for those disciples that had already entrusted their lives to Jesus that their sacrifice was not in vain, that indeed this was the son of God. Yet heard in the context of the end of the previous chapter, with that conversation of tragedy to come still fresh in their minds

and Peter on a collision course to disrupt and interfere with God's plan it takes on a whole new function.

The transfiguration was an opportunity for God to commend his son to those disciples but it was also an opportunity for Jesus to be sure. Sure he had got it right, sure that this was what God wanted for him and those who followed him. And it was an opportunity to show himself in his proper place. They say a picture speaks a thousand words and in this case the scene set before the disciples, and set before us as Jesus followers today, couldn't be clearer.

Jesus is the Christ, the one the disciples were seeking, the one we are all seeking, and he came to be the fulfilment of the Law just as the prophets had foretold. Jesus is the son of God, God says so himself and his face shone like the sun as he was revealed in God's glory. Yet the words from 6 days earlier continue to ring in our ears, he must suffer many things at the hands of the religious authorities and he must die but on the 3rd day he will rise again. In light of the transfiguration the promise of resurrection on the 3rd day comes that little closer for the disciples and it reminds us too of what is to come.

Many of us will struggle through holy week this year, we will experience many emotions as the story is retold each day. We have the chance to experience the joy of the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem next Sunday, Palm Sunday. The scripture allows us to experience the melancholy of Maundy Thursday as what seems to be a celebratory meal with friends turns into the last meal of a condemned man. We will balk at the violence of Good Friday and feel the emptiness and despair of Holy Saturday. But without this real journey of emotions how can we truly share in the joy of the risen lord on Easter day?

We have to keep in mind the big picture because without the whole story taken in context we cannot really experience any of it. Joy without pain is sanitised and a celebration of a resurrection without a commemoration of a death simply doesn't work. If you find the journey difficult and tiring remember 2 things, remember today's gospel and hold on to it throughout your Lenten walk – that little glimpse of the Glory of the risen Christ to help us to understand why that which is to come is necessary and also remember that Jesus did it for each of us, the least we can do is find a way to walk alongside our Lord as we remember.