

## Last Sunday after Epiphany - Transfiguration Luke 9:28-36

It is a rare event, to find a gospel account which exists in all 4 gospel books, particularly without any material difference between the stories. In the case of the transfiguration we have to be satisfied with just 3 out of 4 as this account appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke but not explicitly in John's gospel. As our 3-year cycle of readings favours each of the 3 synoptic gospels in turn, we get to hear this account at this time every year.

Today marks the last Sunday in the ordinary time after Epiphany and foreshadows Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. In the same way, the story of the transfiguration is one which sees Jesus between places; here but also there, on earth but in community with the heavenly. Jesus is with his 3 closest disciples, the ones we know most about, Peter, James and John and then he is with Moses and Elijah while his clothing turns bright white and something, clearly supernatural takes place.

Each year we read the story, and each year we are struck by the scene, Jesus with Moses, the man responsible for bringing God's law to the people, and Elijah, the prophet taken up to heaven without experiencing earthly death with the promise that he would again come to guide people towards the almighty. The pillars of the faith for the Jews, the law and the prophets, were together and alongside Jesus, who is the fulfillment of both. It is an account of a very private experience by the disciples with Jesus, we are told that they didn't share this with anyone until after Jesus' resurrection. It also serves as a convincing encounter for those who would doubt the divinity of Jesus, God tells the disciples with God's own voice that this is his son to whom they are to listen.

But what else might we take from this reading to speak to us in our discipleship today? Looking at the detail there is a tiny thing that separates the Luke account from its counterparts in the other 2 gospels, and that is a description of what the disciples were doing when all this happened. All agree that Jesus took the 3 disciples up to a high mountain, Matthew and Mark then describe the transfiguration, but Luke gives a little more. Luke tells us that Jesus went there with the intention to pray and as he prayed the transfiguration occurred. This is a small detail but important. We could read the other accounts and imagine that Jesus took a select few to show them a wonderful thing, but Luke allows for the possibility that it was far less a planned event and more a spontaneous response from God.

Luke also tells us that the disciples were sleepy, clearly they were less engaged with the prayer than Jesus! It was only once they became fully awake that they could see what was happening. A life changing, visible and physical supernatural event was going on in their vicinity, and the disciples were able to sleep through it. How much might this resonate for us? Often God can be at work in our lives or in the lives of those around us in meaningful ways but we simply don't see it. Sometimes we can recognise that intervention afterwards, but how often has God been involved with our lives and we have passed it by and we are still none the wiser? We might never know!

The transfiguration, then, can be as much a lesson for our current discipleship as it is a description of what once occurred for those first disciples. Jesus offers leadership, guidance and an example of what it is to be a disciple in this short passage and we can all benefit from this teaching today. First Jesus went to a mountain to pray. We must find time to pray, time away from the everyday and the busyness. Quick prayers mumbled in the car or shot up to heaven like little arrows are all well and good, but we are invited into relationship with God by our baptism and that must mean a commitment to pray and communicate with God intentionally and regularly. Coming to church is part of that but finding our own places of peace, our own mountaintops, is important too.

Then we are told the disciples nearly missed the action by their own sleepiness. We must expect and actively look for God's hand at work in our lives. Jesus' teaching and example tells us it is there, but we will only recognise it if we stay awake. Imagine if the disciples had been in this transfiguration encounter but slept through the whole event! Not all Godly activity is going to involve supernatural encounters, but there is joy and comfort in recognising God's hand on a situation and being able to trust ourselves to God's care.

Finally, God spoke to the disciples and we are to hear that same message loud and clear – "this is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him". That is our challenge and our privilege for those of us who have heard God's call, that we recognise Jesus as God's son and we listen to him. At the transfiguration God was instructing the disciples not to go off half-baked and building booths against Jesus' will in honour of Moses and Elijah, but the instruction holds for everything else. Jesus is our leader, our guide, our teacher, our friend, to honour him we must listen to him and act on what we hear. As we prepare to reflect penitential in lent, let us remember to whom we are devoted, Jesus the son of the most high God.