

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 14th February 2021

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Light snow briefly but beautifully transformed our gardens and countryside. In our worship on this Sunday before Lent we remember the transformation or transfiguration of our Lord. In Jesus the full glory of God is revealed and encountered. We bring him our worship. 'Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy' (Psalm 99 verse 9)

Hymn

Prayer

God of all times and all places, God of the infinite and infinitesimal, in the blazing splendour of your glory you called forth light from darkness, day from night, land from oceans, and life in all its dazzling array from lifeless matter. Among the living you made and called humankind imprinting upon us your image, to be bearers of your glory in the world. Though we failed to shine, and hid your image within us, you continued to call us into fellowship with you. You sought to fulfil your mission for us through prophets, scriptures, priests, and made us a people redeemed for yourself. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your holy name. **Amen.**

Bible Reading

Mark chapter 9 verses 2-9

Prayer of confession

Holy God, aware of our weakness and shortcomings we shrink from your majesty. We have glimpsed your glory but have chosen darkness rather than light. we have heard your voice calling us but have not listened. We have claimed to follow Jesus but we have gone our own way. Father, forgive us. Help us to know that we are loved and forgiven and help us to walk in the light of your love.
Amen.

Hymn/Song

Sermon

What do we discover about Jesus and ourselves in his transfiguration? What does that moment on the mountaintop have to say to down here in the valley of lockdown and disease?

I make 3 observations.

Firstly we learn something about **Identity**

Primarily, this significant event also recorded by Matthew and Luke is a moment of revelation. Jesus took 3 of his closest disciples Peter James and John and they withdrew from the crowds to the top of a high mountain to pray. Similarly, as we prepare to enter the season of Lent Jesus leads us on an upward journey to a place of quiet prayer, and closer communion, a climb which can open up for us a new perspective on life, a more open space to see our life below with new vision. This mountain top location indicates that some special revelation was at hand. The mountaintop takes us back to Old Testament times when Moses was commissioned on Mt Horeb and the law given to him on Mount Sinai. The mountain was the place of encounter with God. Now, Peter James and John were about to see Jesus like never before.

Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and his clothes became shining white—whiter than anyone in the world could wash them.

(Mark chapter 9 verses 2-3)

What was happening?

No explanation is given but it is certainly a revelation of Jesus' identity. One hymn writer Michael Hewlett describes how the disciples:

“Watched the wheels of nature stop and heaven break in.

Jesus, their friend of every day, the face they knew for his, they saw for one half hour the way he always is”.

The scene resonates with the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Daniel had a dream where he saw the glory of the Lord

“The ancient of days took his seat, his clothing was as white as snow, the hair of his head was white like wool”.

(Daniel Chapter 7 verse 9)

Peter, James and John also witnessed a similar vision of the Lord.

Here was an unveiling of Jesus' nature - fully human yet fully divine. One commentator states that

'The real miracle was that during most of his time on earth, Jesus could *keep from* displaying His glory!'

How could the light of the world be concealed?

So firstly here with Peter James and John we see Jesus' true identity. The event anticipates his glorious resurrection. We see the splendour of our king, the uncontained glory of his majesty, or as much as we are able to take in. Today we see Jesus in a different way. And consequently we see ourselves in a different way.

Our identity is wrapped up in his. The transfiguration reveals what is to become of us. We are being perfected into his likeness.

We are being changed from glory into glory. In heaven our resurrection bodies shall mirror his glory. Disease and decay will have no more power over us. 1 John chapter 3 verse 2 tells us:

'Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'.

The Bible word Mark uses here for transfigure is *Metamorpheo*

The root of the word metamorphosis.

Think of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly.

In The Message version Eugene Peterson renders it like this:

'His appearance changed from the inside out'.

Metamorphosis. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we allow God's grace to shape us into the likeness of Christ from the inside out.

Secondly we learn something about **destiny**.

I wonder if a part of Jesus would have wanted to ascend back to his heavenly father at that moment of transfiguration.

But he knew he must descend, down the mountain, down to the valley, down to the people, down to Jerusalem, down to the depths of pain and suffering, and eventually to be laid down on the cross and down to stillness in the sealed tomb.

Before they ascended the mountain Jesus warned his disciples:

"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (Mark Chapter 8 verse 31)

This was his destiny. This moment of transfiguration not only shows us where Christ came from but where he was going.

Past, present and future met in this moment as time stood still. Mark tells us how Moses and Elijah, two central figures of the Old Testament, representing the law and the prophets, joined Jesus. Jesus fulfilled both the law and the prophets. Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus. What did they speak of? We can only wonder. This moment was the Father's gift to his Son – to strengthen him for the suffering and death which lay ahead in Holy Week.

This dazzling Messiah was also the suffering servant. We are called to walk with him along the road of self-denial.

Our destiny is wrapped up in his. Before they ascended the mountain Jesus challenged his disciples:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it”.

(Mark Chapter 8 verses 34 & 35)

We are to die daily to ourselves.

Before the eternal glory comes the cross.

Before the crown of victory comes the crown of thorns.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday – some churches would normally offer a service with the imposition of ashes on the forehead with the startling reminder – ‘dust you are to dust you shall return’. In that moment we come face to face with ourselves, with our vulnerability, our frailty, our sin, our mortality.

Dust is not our final destiny but it is an inevitable part of our journey home to God. We even get a glimpse of our humanity in Luke's version of the transfiguration. Luke tells us that on the mountaintop Peter and his companions were very sleepy. The climb had exhausted them. Jesus took them to pray but they soon tired and turned to sleep. Perhaps today we are tired, tired of lockdown, tired of the upward climb. Perhaps we have neglected to pray.

Lent is a call to awake and to arise with new strength.

We are called to awaken to God's presence.

To wake up to a new, brighter vision of God's glory and our destiny in him. To wake up to sin, to see where we might have missed God's way. To prayerfully re-examine our lives, to evaluate our allegiances and affections, to re-order our priorities, to seek divine change in our human bad habits.

To the tired - Jesus says "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest". To the fearful he says 'do not be afraid'. We are called to arise and journey with him.

We see his destiny and in his, we see our own.

Thirdly, we learn something here about **duty**, duty to God and to our neighbour. The disciple's duty is clearly expressed in verse 7: *'A cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, "This is my own dear Son—listen to him!"*

Words of the Father spoken over the son at his baptism and now again at his transfiguration. Listen to him. Seeing isn't everything. We must listen. The disciples were slow to understand Jesus' teaching about his Passion. They did not want to hear talk of rejection and death. They could not follow the map, which Jesus set out before them. They did not understand. Peter wanted to stay.

Build shrines. And had it happened today - taken a selfie.

But their duty lay elsewhere – among the poor and needy.

When they eventually came down from the mountain to rejoin the other disciples, waiting them was a large crowd and great demands. They brought to him a boy who was oppressed and in need of healing. The disciples proved powerless to help.

With exasperation but also compassion Christ stepped in.

By Christ's word of authority the glory of God was then revealed in the healing of the boy. He too was transfigured, changed.

The light of Jesus overcame the darkness. This is the work of God in his Son and it continues today in your life and in mine and in our world through his church. Changing lives from the inside out, one by one, transforming community by nurture and healing through faith in Jesus. In this week ahead we descend again to our duties and immerse ourselves in the ordinary things of life and lockdown.

We return to lives of helpful service.

Amid the needs and the clamour for our attention let us carefully listen for his still small voice within us. God goes with us.

Let us listen for his call to follow him and do his will.

It is our duty and our joy. Let each of us be like a mirror – even if a broken mirror – we can each reflect his glorious light and his love in our homes, in the workplace, in the market place, to the glory of God. Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession

Father God, as your Son drew apart to be in prayer with you, we offer our prayers for the transformation of the world and the church. Today we pray for people whose lives are always uncertain: for people in war torn parts of the world; for all who wonder where their next meal will come from; for people who are jobless or homeless. God of glory, surround us with the light of your presence.

We pray for situations in the world that need hope and healing and in particular for Yemen, for Russia, and for Myanmar.

We ask for words and actions that are full of hope and not hate, of forgiveness and unity and not division.

May we all be mindful of the power of our words, and use our speaking to build others up, not to tear them down.

We pray for all who work in communications and the media, that they would report with honesty and integrity, and that they would use their roles to speak truth to power.

This week, may we seek to respond to the needs of others with messages, words and actions of hope and comfort.

God of glory, surround us with the light of your presence.

We thank you for the tireless effort of nurses, doctors and consultants, caring for patients, especially those who are suffering from Covid-19. We give thanks for the vaccine rollout. We ask that you would give all medical staff peace as they care for the sick, and peace as many of them wait at the bedside of those who are at the end of life. We thank you that the ordinary tasks of routine, order and gentleness can bless the boundary between life and death. As discussions begin about a future return to school, we pray that the needs of children and young people would be central. We pray for all who have been kept apart from those they love; for those who have not been able to mourn for friends and family who have died, and we pray especially for relatives of people in care homes – surround them all with your healing presence.

We remember people in our own communities who are suffering asking that you would lighten the pain and distress of daily life.

We pray for each church family today.

You are the God who comes close to us: though we are apart from each other. God of glory, surround us with the light of your presence. Open our eyes and open our hearts. Help us to see Jesus. Change us into his likeness and renew us by your Holy Spirit.

Help us to follow him this Lent, from the Mount of Transfiguration to the Mount of Olives, to the hill of Calvary and beyond. **Amen.**
Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray
The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/Song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.
May the Lord transform us with love and empower us to act as a
transfigured people.
The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine on you:
The Lord look on you in kindness
And give you peace
Amen.

Coffee Time Conversation

- What transformation in our world do you long for?
- What spiritual transformation do you long for?
- Is there anything you want to take up or leave behind this Lent?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise
Love divine all loves excelling
Abide with me

More Contemporary Music:

Be still for the presence of the Lord
Praise is rising
Purify my heart

Keep social distancing.
Keep safe.
Keep communicating.
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.
My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter

for God so loved the world

that He gave His

only Son that

whoever believes

in Him

should not

perish but have

eternal

life -John 3:16