

2024-02-11 ... 10am Morning Worship Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

2 Kings 2: 1 – 12; 2 Corinthians 4: 3 – 6; Mark 9: 2 - 9

**The Transfiguration** marks a transition in the gospels – it appears in three, Matthew and Luke as well as Mark which we have heard this morning as the stories move from Jesus's lifetime teaching to the preparing of his disciples for his death. As our church season moves from Epiphany, the revealing of who Jesus is, to Lent, we mirror the gospel pattern.

It is a story familiar to those of you who have been coming to church awhile, we hear it each year the Sunday before Lent begins and sometimes also in the summer as the Feast of the Transfiguration is the 6<sup>th</sup> of August. Which tells us something about the importance of the moment!

Let us look first at the story itself. It takes place on a high mountain – nearer to God in heaven in the imagery of the Bible, out on a limb, not unlike the wilderness. And Jesus was transfigured before the three disciples. Certainly translated in the way we heard it, it sounds as if this is a show laid on for Peter, James and John. The dazzling white is clearly other-worldly. I feel sure that Jesus must have felt something too, an energy, a vibration but this is not said.

Peter, James and John must lose their sight momentarily because of the brightness because the next they know they are looking at Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. How did they identify Elijah and Moses? We don't know, their appearance presumably matched biblical descriptions, and contemporary imagery.

In 1 Kings, Elijah is called the Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead which perhaps ascribed a certain look.

In 2 Kings he is described as a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist.

We're told the three disciples were frightened – but not the root cause – the closeness to God? Of what the bright light might mean, like some are frightened of lightning? Did they think they had been taken there to die?

Peter seems to have felt obliged to become part of the scene and not just an observer, he wants to be seen to be doing the right thing – but not knowing what that was .... And with the benefit of hindsight we laugh at what he did say.

We don't know what Jesus, Elijah and Moses said to each other – we don't know if Jesus knew that this was a scheduled meeting – we don't know if such a meeting had occurred before but out of sight of human eyes.

It seems that it was an event that only lasted a very short while before a cloud covered them all. Not a fog that takes away a climber's sense of direction but a cloud that contained God – can you imagine being covered by God? Was that cloud a blanket of comfort or fear? We don't know.

They hear God's voice, directed it seems to the disciples. '***This is my Son, the Beloved*** (beloved by God, that is), and the command ... '***Listen to Him!***'

For us the reader, this is an echo of God's voice being plainly heard that one other time, at Jesus's baptism. That time the voice was for Jesus to hear – ***You are my Son, the Beloved ... with you I am well pleased.*** And the disciples were still fishermen then and not there.

And then it is all over, and it is time for the four of them to go back down the mountain. Jesus tells them that for now, this is just for them ... and we get that pointing forwards – they must stay quiet about it until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead .... Which they do not understand. **PTO**

Elijah was and is an important figure for those of the Hebrew faith. His name is invoked in several Jewish ceremonies including at the end of the Sabbath, during the Passover meal and at circumcisions. Apart from his wisdom as a prophet there is that he is taken up from earth in a whirlwind riding a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire as we heard – leaving no body to be buried.

And so the perhaps not dead Elijah is important to those of the Hebrew faith as they look forward to the coming of the Messiah, encapsulated in the book of Malachi, one of the minor prophets, where it is written: ***'Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.'***

In the Hebrew bible, the book of Malachi comes with those of the other 11 minor prophets in the first half. The early Christians who set up the Bible as we know it moved around the books of the Hebrew Bible and made Malachi the last book of the Old Testament, thus emphasising the continuation of the story of God, drawing on the several references to Elijah in the gospels, and in particular an identification with John the Baptist as the one sent ahead to warn of God's coming.

From the very short passage of Paul, we hear him emphasising how God's light reveals the truth and how that can be a wonderful or a terrifying thing and perhaps both at the same time.

At the transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw for a moment who Jesus was; something they could not understand fully, a mystery but clearly extraordinary in its most literal sense, awesome, and yet real.

That transfiguration, that revealing of the holiness of the Son of Man, is brought to us today in story. Next week we will share in that mystery of our faith, as, at the taking of the bread and wine, or in receiving a blessing at that same ceremony, God trusts us with God's presence given to us, to be held within us, a symbol that we share in the mystery of the holy truth, which transfigures us.

God was, and is and is to come. Alleluia and Amen!