

Today in the church calendar is the day we remember Christ's transfiguration.

Today signals the beginning of Lent... the walk towards Easter.

On Tuesday we'll have pancakes, traditionally a time to use up fatty, rich foods before the fasting of Lent.

Wednesday is Ash Wednesday a time when we remember that we are but dust, we mark ourselves with an ashen cross –

and as Lent begins, we actively choose to return to God, conscious of our mortality, our nakedness, our regrets and our sin.

Today, as I've said we focus on Christ's transfiguration which I think is very similar to the account of Christ's baptism.

Christ's baptism marked the start of his ministry. It was a time where Christ was renewed in the Holy Spirit and validated by the Father through the blessing, "This is my son, with whom I am well pleased."

Christ's transfiguration is very similar in that it marks the start of his walk towards Jerusalem, the start of his journey to the cross, the beginning of his redemptive purpose.

And again, we see similar markings, Jesus being renewed by the Holy Spirit and validated by the Father through another blessing, "This is my son, listen to him."

You see, from this point onward, Christ began his walk towards the events of Jerusalem and his death on another mountainside.

As I sat down to write my sermon this week, this sermon presented me with a problem.

I was determined to find a common point between the scripture text and something you and I can really get a hold of from our own lives.

A touch point, a modern-day parable, perhaps even a life experience that would somehow match, but this week I just couldn't find anything.

You see what happens on top of that mountain is such a unique experience that I simply can't find a parallel.

Most of the time our lives are ordinary... we don't live each day in a state of religious ecstasy or fervour.

And that most of life, even faith, has to be lived down the mountain.

But for now, let's spend a minute just imagining what it would have been like,
to be there on top of that mountain,
to have been Peter or John or James,
to have seen some sort of dramatic change in Jesus,
to see him glowing in a splendour and glory,
in the presence of Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest men that had ever lived,
and then a cloud... an awesome presence,
and then those words... "This is my son, listen to him."

What an amazing moment.

What an astonishing and shocking event.

It is something that we are simply not prepared for as humans,
something that even the disciples were not ready to deal with.

I love Peter's response - scripture says,

"not knowing what to say... Peter asked Jesus if they should build three altars!"

You see Peter was overwhelmed by it all....

he wanted to cling on to the experience...

to make it last somehow.

It was a truly holy and spiritual moment, and the best that Peter could do,

was mumble incoherently and offer what can best be described as a "bad idea."

It is not the first time where humans have failed to find words or actions in the face of the Almighty.

In our Old Testament scripture today, we read that the people were fearful of seeing the reflection of God's radiance upon Moses' face, and so Moses put a veil over his face.

They didn't even come into direct contact with God, they simply came into contact with someone else who had seen God and even that was enough to strike awe and fear into the hearts of the Israelites.

It is a strange story... but I imagine that all of us can remember seeing people who have shone with joy, or something like it. Perhaps some in love, or a new father fresh with the news of his child's birth, anyone with a new reason to smile and be glad.

And sometimes people who are good and lovely, or about whom there is a remarkable serenity –

are described as those who shine.

But of course, we also know, that no one shines all the time,

and that for most of us life has its dull patches,

its prosaic ordinariness, its patterns and routines.

Transfiguration would have nothing to transfigure if it were there the whole time.

Even Moses, and even Jesus, did not spend their whole time shining with a holy light!

But let's return again to our text from Luke for a little longer and notice a few other things.

Luke highlights that this was an amazing experience that happened within the context of prayer.

Jesus and his disciples had withdrawn from the hum drum, the business of life to a place of solitude and calm and quiet in order to seek God.

While high up on the mountain we learn that Jesus is transfigured.

The same account in Mark and Matthew, use the Greek word, metamorphosis,

suggesting a complete change in Jesus' appearance.

Like a caterpillar which changes into a butterfly.

Moses and Elijah, says Luke, were speaking with Jesus about his departure, a departure which he was going to fulfil in Jerusalem.

The word for departure, is the word '*exodus*.'

And I think Luke means us to understand this in several senses.

It can mean, like exodus in the Old Testament, a departure or going away.

It can also serve as a euphemism for death, as when someone says I am no longer here – referring to their own death.

But Luke probably also used this work to make a clear connection with Moses.

For in Jesus' death, Jesus will enact an event just like the great Exodus from Egypt, but only more so.

In the first Exodus, Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and home to the Promised Land.

In the new Exodus, Jesus will lead all God's people out of the slavery of sin and death, and home to the promised inheritance – the new creation in which the whole world will be redeemed and restored.

Jesus himself then, went through this mountain top experience knowing that it was preparing him to follow where the Law and the Prophets had pointed – down into the valley – to the place of despair and death.

We've already noted that the disciples were overwhelmed by this experience and blurted out things they didn't mean.

They were unable to understand how it was that the glory of God's chosen son, the Servant who was carrying in himself the promise of redemption, would finally be unveiled on a very different hill, an ugly little hill outside Jerusalem.

For us today, we too often find it completely bewildering to know how to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of great joy and our times of great sadness.

Life can be hard, stressful, difficult for all sorts of reasons...

But in this story of transfiguration there is a hint, no, more than a hint,

that the ordinary, difficult fleshly reality of the everyday is not the end of it,

but that it is a kind of veil, and there is more to be seen, more to be known.

And it may be, as the ancients believed,

that this other reality is after all too much for us to bear all the time,

that it is better to live behind the veil, or down the mountain,

for most of our days.

But to see the ordinary daily life we know as a kind of veil, is to develop a longing for the world that lies beyond,

as yet unfulfilled and unrealized, but always hinted at among us.

These are precious moments with the veil is lifted... holy, thin moments,

holy, thin places when we encounter God...

As we worship, as we pray, as we read God's word –

moments when we see God – face to face.

Moments of mountain top encounter.

At these times we are transfigured, for God shines his light into our hearts.

For us here today, as we seek to follow Jesus – to be his disciples ,

in the ordinariness of our lives, even when we haven't got a clue what's going on,

resonate those words that came from the cloud that strange day in Galilee:

'This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.'

'This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.'

As we now look forward to Lent,
may it be the start of our journey deeper into relationship with Christ.

Let's commit to finding quiet and calm,
space and time to listen to all that Jesus says.

Remember - Lent is not about us trying harder...rather it is an opportunity for us to relish in
God's love and grace.

May this Lent be a time where by the grace of God,
the veil is lifted, and we experience a mountain top encounter with Him.

A moment, when we're transformed and changed
so that we too, like Moses and Christ,
will radiate and shine God's glory and splendour to all those that we meet.

Amen.

As a way of taking some time to meet with Jesus can I commend to you our Lent Book this year – Living Faith. It's a series of studies which you can either follow at home, or better still join a lent group for six weeks and you can discuss with others and share together. The books are available at the back of church, and details about Lent Groups.