

**Hurst Green**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Mar 20**  
**The transfiguration**  
**Matt 17:1-13**

Having been dashing through Thessalonians Easter has crept up on us and we are now in Lent. The CTOD Lent courses have started looking at Hymns as part of worship and they seem to be going well.

Lent is, of course, another time of preparation just like Advent. Having prepared for Christmas and the wonder of the start of the unveiling of God's plan we almost immediately slip into preparing for the unveiling of the awesome majesty of God's plan as we celebrate the amazing fact of Jesus' resurrection.

And always remember it is a fact. The world tries to deny it as it has been for over 2000 years but it is a fact and we will look at more on that on Easter Sunday.

But Easter leaves us preachers with a quandary. Yet again we have a very familiar story that we all know and love but we all know it to a point where it has lost its meaning or certainly its excitement.

Yes we know we are meant to be excited and we will sing about Love and Joy but how do we get that back into our lives? How do we stop treating this as familiar and get really excited about Easter?

Christmas is relatively easy as the world gets excited about that and we can go along with them. But Easter? Chocolate eggs and bunny rabbits! The world likes Easter, although they wish it would not keep moving around, but they don't get excited about it.

So I am faced with that challenge that faces preachers across the world. How do I get you excited about Easter? As a non-conformist church I could take the easy way out and ignore Lent as something the traditional churches do – pretend to give up something and carry on with life.

But then Easter just turns up and we don't have the opportunity to get excited because it just comes and goes. The Church calendar does have a reason although I don't believe we should follow it slavishly.

And so for our Easter preparation we are going to look at some key events on Jesus' road to Jerusalem and we are going to start with the Transfiguration although according to that calendar I should preach this the Sunday before Lent starts!!

So this common story of the transfiguration and I start by having a problem with the name "Transfiguration"

I accept that it is a good translation – indeed with my language skills I could do little else but accept it.

But it gives the wrong picture.

The very definition of transfiguration is a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state.

But that leads us to miss what is really happening here and that it turn leads us to miss a great lesson for us all.

Traditionally we have been taught this as a wondrous change in Jesus and a crass response from Peter.

Both of these are wrong for they lead us into the two traditional approaches to this story which is either to show us that we have highlights in our Christian life but that we have to go back down the mountain or to focus on Peter foolish response which shows humanity at work.

I would like to argue today that nothing changes in the transfiguration. All that happens is the three disciples are allowed a glimpse of the real Jesus – the Jesus in all his glory that had always existed and will always exist because this is who he is – this is the real Jesus

This is the glory we have also been called to.

In Hebrews we are told that Christ was bringing many sons to glory – and you are one of those sons. You are being brought to glory.

***Colossians 3:4 (ANIV)***

*<sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

And there are many other bible verses which show us that while the glory always belongs to God and we are commanded to do everything to his glory.

And we could look at a great deal else about the glory of God but that is not the purpose of today's message.

And do you remember Moses?

Exodus 34 – Moses had been with God and he came down the mountain with a radiant face – so radiant that he wore a veil but that radiance would fade over time but each time he went into God's presence that radiance would be restored.

Now this is the lesson for us.

We know that we reflect God's glory to the world around us for we are told in

***2 Corinthians 3:18 (ANIV)***

*<sup>18</sup> And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

But the difference for us is that we do not have to let it fade as it did with Moses for we have a major difference. We have God with us.

The Spirit lives within us.

We don't go from God's presence when we leave here. We remain in God's presence and so the glory of God remains with us.

We have that ever increasing glory and so we don't go down the mountain – we seek to go to even higher peaks.

Now let's be honest for we live in the real world – we all have off days. Times when things are not going so smoothly.

Times when we trip up.

Times when the world gets to us and we don't feel on a spiritual high.

Of course in those times God does not leave us for he has promised never to leave us and he keeps his promises.

It's just that we feel more distant from him. He does not have the pre-eminence in our lives that he deserves.

And we should not beat ourselves up about that – acknowledge that these days happen and then get back to reflecting God's glory.

So up on that mountain top the three disciples got to see the real Jesus.

But why?

Well they were about to go through a real difficult time.

They were to be taught about things that they did not understand – why Jesus had to suffer and die and they would be taught about the resurrection – that great day of glory that we will celebrate in a few weeks' time.

And then they had to endure the reality of it all.

This all demonstrates one of the great mercies of God that we need to remember.

Often before we face great difficulties God will reveal himself to you in new ways.

He does this so that you will have the comfort and strength when those hard times arrive.

It is an act of mercy to give us all we need to stand firm – all we need and more.

That is not to say that is the only time God reveals himself because otherwise we would dread God revealing more of himself because every time he does bad things happen.

No God is consistent and his presence is with us and so we have a constant revelation of God so that we may reflect his glory.

And every now and then he reveals himself in new ways and we have a spiritual high. It may be when we go away to a conference or other spiritual event or it may even be here in your church or even in your own home.

God does things his own way and I will not teach you that there is only one way for God to reveal himself because that is not true. God chooses how to reveal himself when he wants to!

And this is why Peter's reaction was so correct. He gets derided either for trying to stay in the moment or for trying to do something practical when he was being shown something spiritual but I think he has a point

**Matthew 17:4 (ANIV)**

<sup>4</sup> *Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

Firstly note that Jesus does not rebuke him in any way – it is only later scholars that do that.

I say that Peter was right to try and stay in the moment for we are all seeking a revelation of God and here is God revealing himself.

As a Christian we know that we still have to carry on in this murky world in which we live with all its vagaries but what is wrong with wanting to stay in the revelation of God?

In fact we should expect to stay there because we have just been transformed from one degree of glory to another and nowhere does the bible tell us that we should constantly be slipping back all the time.

We should seek to hang on to the revelation because we want to move onward and upward not downward.

And if you look at this passage you will see that is exactly what happens.

***Matthew 17:5 (ANIV)***

<sup>5</sup> *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

Peter had not even finished with his idea to stay in the moment when the three of them were taken to even greater degree of glory.

They heard the voice of God repeating what had been said at Jesus baptism with a subtle difference and an extension.

The difference is that at the baptism God says "You are my son" speaking directly to Jesus.

This time he speaks to the disciples saying "This is my son"

And the extension? "listen to him" – a command from God directly to them and to us today. Listen to Jesus.

And then Jesus touches them because they are afraid.

So there is a different view of the transfiguration – it is not about going back down the mountain or making crass comments about the physical when it is the spiritual that matters.

It's all about what you see.

Are you with Peter as he saw beyond the humanity of Christ to see him infused with the eternal glory of God?

Do you see God at work in the day to day? Because he is there.

But more importantly do you see what Peter saw?

Do you see the opportunity to stay in the moment?

Do you see the opportunity to be taken to even higher levels?

Do you see the glory all around you?

Do you see the glory in you?

What do you see?