

Transfiguration 2016 – 10.30 am

I am beginning my remarks this morning by quoting a text of music. Now, let me tell you, it's tempting to use the words of the communion motet "You shall know him when he comes"! But more appropriate really to use the gradual hymn which echoes the sentiment of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration – "'Tis good Lord to be here". It is good to be here as your parish priest – very good - and to be starting our ministry together. Thank you for your very warm welcome that I have received, not just this week, but earlier in July especially when I joined the choir on our trip to the UK.

Also today it is great to welcome members of the congregation from St Peter's Carelton Street. It is good that you are here.

A month ago – on July the 6th our choir and other members of the parish landed in Manchester and travelled by coach to Lincoln. Two things stand out for me on that journey to our first destination. First, in spite of jetlag, it was an absolutely beautiful drive through the Peninnes – stunning scenery. Second was the excited voice of one chorister a little later who said, "look everyone, there's the cathedral!" We were still some miles away but we could see the impressive image of Lincoln cathedral in the distance, because it is grand, majestic and it is on a hill. For over 600 years Lincoln cathedral was the largest building in the

world. It was and still is a place of pilgrimage with the shrine of St Hugh of Lincoln. It was built on a hill to be seen, to be a place of destination, a place of spiritual growth and transformation. That's what a holy place is intended for. We travelled there, yes to sing the services of the week, but more importantly as a kind of spiritual pilgrimage – you can't go to a spiritual place like that and not be affected, changed, transformed.

One day, in the midst of his teaching ministry and with the cross looming in the distance, Jesus took his closest friends up a mountain. Mount Tabor is not far from Nazareth, but it was for them a place of pilgrimage and transformation. The three disciples went there with Jesus knowing the story of Moses going up the mountain, being given the law, and Elijah the prophet, both of whom came down from the mountain with faces that were changed, shining like the sun.

So vivid were these connections that in this encounter they actually saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus in his risen glory, his face changed and his clothes a dazzling white. And what were they saying? The unthinkable. They were speaking of his departure which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Except departure is not the word they used. The word in the original Greek is "Exodus". Peter knew about the Exodus, He was raised with it. It meant death to the old life through the dread waters of the Red Sea, to a

new life – just as we recall at the Easter Vigil and every time we celebrate Baptism.

So, the Transfiguration – a major feast in the life of the church that usually gets lost at the height of summer speaks about the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: the glory of God in creation, in the law and the prophets comes to its fullness in Jesus.

So stunned was Peter by this glory and by this connection that he said “This is fantastic. Let’s stay here a while. I’ll build some tents for us to stay in, one for you, and one for Moses and one for Elijah”. We can understand his excitement but maybe he didn’t listen to the message? He just blurted this out like he blurted everything else out. And notice what Jesus said: “No...We’ve got to go back down the mountain and pick up the threads once more”.

What of us? We who are the recipients of that long ago transfiguring experience that both blinded and gave vision to Peter, and James and John? Like them, we must take something with us, which is to say that the vision of God’s glory is the basis, the foundation of newness of life. If we lose that vision, we can lose the mainstay of our spiritual life.

We must be prepared that the invitation to walk with the Lord on the mountain and on the plain can come at any time – usually unexpected and unplanned – remember that. Our prayer must be that we hear the invitation when it is given and have the courage, and the faith, and the conviction to listen and to respond.

There will be a day when an ordinary moment of worship becomes extraordinary. When bread in my mouth or wine on my lips communicate the wonder of Christ’s body and blood in a moment of illumination and conviction that is undeniable. There will be encounters and inner experiences – good and bad, painful and comforting – when the mists which shroud my poor humanity from the Lord’s glory will, for one shining moment, be removed.

Then there will be the longing which Peter knew, to stay on the mountain top – to cling to the companionship, to remain at the fire, to bask in the radiance.

But as Peter and his friends found out that day, it is also a thing of infinite satisfaction to return from the mountain top, and remembering the glory, to serve in the world. Think about how this transfiguration story ends. When they came down from the mountain that morning there was a huge crowd waiting for them. In the midst was a young boy having an epileptic seizure, and his dad crying for help.

Back to work...but never the same...

...For the Lord the mountaintop is also encountered in the experiences of my days and yours. You see, the Law of God is inscribed, not on stone tablets, but in you and in me. As we reflect upon our parish life - and perhaps more importantly as we begin our journey our pilgrimage in Christ together - look, listen, be still for a moment, and know that God is in the midst of our days - know as Peter did, that somewhere in the rush of life there is a vision of loveliness, of peace and joy and hope in believing that is available to us. There is no end to the doors by which the wind and the light and the voices of the transfiguration can enter our lives. If we are disturbed that these magnificent moments can only **be** for a moment, then perhaps we must comfort one another with the realisation that maybe it only takes a moment of such an encounter to transform and transfigure us, in some way. A moment of glory is maybe all we need, and maybe all we can really take.

On this Feast of the Transfiguration we give thanks that God enables us to see beyond the veil...for a moment...in order to refresh a lifetime. And we do well to remember the words of the Greeks in Jerusalem who came to Philip. They were on a pilgrimage of their own and they said, "Sir we would see Jesus", John 12.20.

In our shared ministry may we and those around us see Jesus, crucified, risen, glorified. Amen+