

WORSHIP AT HOME FOR 14TH FEBRUARY 2021 – THE TRANSFIGURATION

Dear Friends,

Almost Lent again! What a year this last one has proved to be! We will have experienced a gamut of emotions through it – but through it all, the good and the bad, God is with us, holding us close. Here, today, we leave behind the accounts of Jesus' early ministry to prepare for Lent – Ash Wednesday is in the coming week. The account of the Transfiguration is a turning point in Mark's Gospel, reorienting us from the details of Jesus' busy earthly ministry and pointing us towards the glory that is to come.

Until we meet again – *Margaret*

Call to Worship: There is a journey to glory that starts where we are and invites us to climb mountains and travel through valleys. It is an everyday journey yet smuggled into every step is an explosion of glory that transfigures the world, and, as those who follow realise, there is more to this world than we can ask or imagine.

May we be open to glory – open to asking questions – open to the adventures to which they lead – open to the mystery of faith, and open to growth in belief – as mountain top followers and valley companions. May we be open to you everywhere, infinite God. **Amen**

When faith is not easy – when life contains fear – when the wonder is too great – we come to you, O God, confused, worried that we have not grasped who you are. Yet as we encounter mystery, we encounter that first moment with you. May we experience you anew, every time and every day. **Amen**

The words to 'Immortal, invisible' written by Walter Chalmers Smith [1824-1908]. Singing the Faith 55

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light, nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might –

Thy justice like mountains high soaring above thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small; in all life thou livest, the true life of all.

4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;

All praise we would render; O help us to see 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

Thou blessed, thou glorious, thou Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Prayer: As we come to prayer we reflect on the words used on the mountain of transfiguration:

'This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.'

Mysterious God, may we be open to you in this world – may we pause and wonder a little longer – stop and imagine a little more often – dream a little more deeply – hope a little more readily. May we have the means to see not with eyes that always grow dim, but with hearts and souls that see the colours all the more vividly – the deep purples, and octarines; the colour of laughter and the shape of love. May we let go for a moment those hands that grasp too tightly the *stuff* of life and let ourselves fall into the *glory* of life to find you there, calling us back into this world with new vision and strength.

Be our inspiration, Lord, and show us your glory, as we travel with you the Way of the Cross.

Yet, Lord, we need to ask you to forgive us when we lose ourselves in mystery without living in reality; and for those times when we talk too much about God yet do too little of God's work; those times when we take up time explaining and spend too little time doing. Hear our confession and turn us, O God, towards living the mystery – walking the talk – explaining through doing – and let the wonder reveal in people your glory born in us all. **Amen**

Jesus' divine nature was confirmed on the mountain – he is God's beloved Son. He went on to suffer; he died and rose again for us, conquering sin and death. Now he sits at God's right hand, glorified in heaven – and thanks to him, we are completely forgiven. Lord, shine on us, we pray. **Amen**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever Amen.

2 Kings 2: 1-12: *Elijah taken to heaven:*

Now the time came for the Lord to take Elijah to heaven – by means of a whirlwind! Elijah said to Elisha as they left Gilgal, 'Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Bethel.' But Elisha replied, 'I swear to God that I won't leave you!' So they went on together to Bethel. There the young prophets of Bethel Seminary came out to meet them and asked Elisha, 'Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away from you today?' 'Quiet!' Elisha snapped. 'Of course I know it.'

Then Elijah said to Elisha, 'Please stay here in Bethel, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.' But Elisha replied again: 'I swear to God that I won't leave you.' So they went on together to Jericho. The students at Jericho Seminary came to Elisha and asked him: 'Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away today?' 'Will you please be quiet!' he commanded. 'Of course I know it.'

Then Elijah said to Elisha, 'Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan river.' But Elisha replied as before, 'I swear to God that I won't leave you.' So they went on together and stood beside the Jordan river as fifty of the young prophets watched from a distance. Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it; and the river divided and they went across on dry ground! When they arrived on the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, 'What wish shall I grant you before I am taken away?' And Elisha replied, 'Please grant me twice as much prophetic power as you have had.' 'You have asked a hard thing,' Elijah replied. 'If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won't.' As they were walking along, talking, suddenly a chariot of fire, drawn by horses of fire, appeared and drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven.

Elisha saw it and cried out: 'My father! My father! The Chariot of Israel and the charioteers!' As they disappeared from sight he tore his robe.

Comment: Before this passage, [1 Kings 19: 1-21] we would hear that, after triumphing on Mount Carmel, Elijah again escaped from King Ahab to Mount Horeb where he encountered God in 'a sound of sheer silence' and was commanded to anoint Elisha as his successor by throwing his mantle [or cloak] over him. Now, although Elijah wants to meet the Lord alone, he lets Elisha accompany him across the Jordan. Because Elisha sees the death of the old man returning to the wilderness as nothing less than his ascension into heaven, he inherits Elijah's spirit, receiving the 'double portion' of the firstborn son [Deuteronomy 21:17]. Elisha also inherits Elijah's mantle or cloak, enabling him also to part the waters of the Jordan and so cross on dry land, returning to continue the prophetic ministry to Israel.

Mark 9: 2-10: Jesus took Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain. No one else was there. Suddenly his face began to shine with glory, and his clothing became dazzling white, far more glorious than any earthly process could ever make it! Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus. 'Teacher, this is wonderful!' Peter exclaimed. 'We will make three shelters here, one for each of you.....' He said this just to be talking, for he didn't know what else to say and they were all terribly frightened.

But while he was still speaking these words, a cloud covered them, blotting out the sun, and a voice from the cloud said: 'This is my Beloved Son. Listen to *him*.'

Then suddenly they looked round and Moses and Elijah were gone, and only Jesus was with them. As they descended the mountainside he told them never to mention what they had seen until after he had risen from the dead. So they kept it to themselves, but often talked about it and wondered what he had meant by rising from the dead.

Comment: Only a week before this the disciples were at Caesarea Philippi where Peter confessed Jesus as the 'Christ' – and there that Jesus had told them of the suffering that lay ahead. David Adam [one time vicar of Lindisfarne] writes that "perhaps there was a need for some of the disciples at least to see some brightness behind the dark clouds that threatened."

Jesus took the three disciples up the mountainside for them to be alone – and what happened there was an experience that the disciples couldn't put into words. They became aware of the radiance of Jesus – and of the presence of Moses and Elijah. In Jesus they were aware that all that Moses and Elijah had hoped would come to pass was now fulfilled.

From David Adam: 'Like Moses, Jesus would bring his people to the freedom of the Promised Land. He would give them a new way of life and free them from slavery. Elijah was said to be the greatest of the prophets. Now, in Jesus, all the hopes of the prophets were to be fulfilled. In the Christ is the second Moses and the second Elijah whom the people of God longed for.' A vision like that would carry the disciples a long way in itself – but more was to come because the cloud that overshadowed them held within it the presence of the Father. God was there in all his fullness – but his glory had to be hidden for the sake of the men. Just as God had appeared to Moses in the cloud, now he was in the cloud on this mountainside. And then the voice from the cloud: 'This is my Beloved Son, listen to *him*.' Then the vision faded and Jesus, Peter, James and John made their way back down the mountain and headed for Jerusalem. Back to the ordinary way of life – but they had had a glimpse of the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

We too are offered a glimpse of this glory as we turn towards Lent and the events of Holy Week. We are also asked to 'Listen to him!' And listening also means obeying him. Keep our eyes on Jesus and get a glimpse of the glory of God.

From 2 Corinthians 4:6: 'For it is the God who said: 'let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

The words of 'Stay, Master, stay' written by Samuel Greg [1804-1876]. Hymns and Psalms 158

1 Stay, Master, stay upon this heavenly hill, a little longer, let us linger still;

With all the mighty ones of old beside, near to the awful Presence still abide;

Before the throne of light we trembling stand, and catch a glimpse into the spirit-land.

2 Stay, Master, stay! We breathe a purer air; this life is not the life that awaits us there;

Thoughts, feelings, flashes, glimpses come and go; we cannot speak them – nay, we do not know;

Wrapt in this cloud of light we seem to be the thing we fain would grow – eternally.

3 No, saith the Lord, the hour is past, we go; Our home, our life, our duties lie below.

While here we kneel upon the mount of prayer, the plough lies waiting in the furrow there.

Here we sought God that we might know his will; there we must do it, serve him, seek him still.

Prayer: The heavens and the earth witness to the transforming power of God. We bring into God's presence those places and situations that we long to see changed – transformed for the glory of God.

We pray for countries torn apart by war – for refugees looking for safety – for those imprisoned for their faith – and for those who will go hungry today.

We pray for our nation – for those with political power – for those who lead our financial institutions, and for those who lead by popular acclaim.

We pray for the poor in our community – for those who are unemployed or unable to work – for those whose livelihood has been sabotaged by the pandemic and the necessary restrictions to try to curb it. We pray for the very young and the very old, and for those who are alone.

We pray for the young people whose ways of learning have been so disrupted and pray that they will take every opportunity as time goes on to get back on track.

We pray for all those who offer support in these times – for doctors, nurses and carers – for the those who work in the emergency services - for those working in social services, in prisons, and wherever they are needed.

We pray for those who have asked for our prayers – for those who are ill or in need – for those who are nearing the end and for those who love them and care for them. We pray for those who are aching with loss.

We pray for ourselves and for our own journey of discipleship – we pray for courage, steadfast faith and wisdom in all we say or do. In Jesus' precious name we pray. **Amen**

Illustration: David Adam: The day before the civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King was killed by a sniper's bullet he said words of encouragement to a large crowd:

"We've got difficult days ahead. But it does not matter to me now. Because I have been to the mountain top, I won't mind. Like anyone else I should like to live a long life.....but I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up the mountain. And I have looked over and seen the Promised land. So I am happy tonight, I am not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

Like Martin Luther King, if we are to survive dark days, we need to have a vision of the glory of our God and hold on to that glimpse of glory.

Meditation of Peter [Nick Fawcett – No Ordinary Man]:

I wanted to hold on to that moment for ever, to keep things just as they were for the rest of eternity, for I feared life would never be so special again. It was just the four of us – well, six if you count Moses and Elijah, but I'm not sure you can do that – the four of us sharing a blessed moment of peace and quiet; no crowds pleading for a miracle; no lepers begging for a healing; no Pharisees baying for his blood; no Sadducees spoiling for a fight.

Just us, together, as we had all too rarely been. And we knew it couldn't last; he'd made that perfectly clear when I dared suggest otherwise. There was trouble round the corner, his enemies waiting to pounce – and he knew it was only a matter of time before they got him. Not much of a prospect, was it – rejection, suffering, death? I don't know how he stuck it, I really don't. But we didn't want to think about such things, not then anyway, and up there on the mountain it all seemed a million miles away – out of sight, out of mind. Can you blame me for wanting to stay – for wanting to hold on to the moment for as long as possible? Only I couldn't, of course. You can't stop the clock, can you, and make the world stand still? You can't store those golden moments of time safely away, untarnished by the march of time. Life goes on, they say, and you have to go with it, like it or not.

It was hard to accept that – hard to go back to the daily round with its familiar demands and expectations. Yet, as I spoke to Jesus, coming down the mountain, I realised suddenly it had to be; that there was no other way – going back, I mean. Without that there would have been no point – those sacred moments an empty illusion. He knew that, and slowly – very slowly – I came to know it too. It was a vital time, a special time – one that gave him new strength, new resolve, the inspiration he needed to face the future and fulfil his destiny. But it was as much for us as it was for him – a moment we could look back upon, so that afterwards we might keep on looking forward.

Prayer: Loving God, there are some moments we never want to end – when we wish we could make time stand still and keep things just as they are for ever. But life is not like that, and neither is faith. It must always move on if it is to grow – always develop if it is not to grow stale.
Help us then, through Jesus Christ, to be open to new experiences of your love and new insights into your greatness, and so may we know you a little more each day. **Amen**

2 Corinthians 4: 3-6: If the Good News we preach is hidden to anyone, it is hidden from the one who is on the road to eternal death. Satan, who is the god of this evil world, has made him blind, unable to see the glorious light of the Gospel that is shining upon him, or to understand the amazing message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is God. We do not go around preaching about ourselves, but about Christ Jesus as Lord. All we say of ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us. For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made us understand that it is the brightness of his glory that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

**The words to ‘The splendour of the King’ written by Chris Tomlin [b. 1972] Ed Cash and Jesse Reeves.
Singing the Faith 15**

1 The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty;
Let all the earth rejoice, let all the earth rejoice.
He wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide,
And trembles at his voice; and trembles at his voice.
How great is our God, sing with me, how great is our God, and all will see how great, how great is our God.

2 And age to age he stands, and time is in his hands,
Beginning and the end, beginning and the end.
The Godhead, Three-in-One – Father, Spirit, Son,
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb.
How great is our God.....

3 Name above all names, worthy of all praise,
My heart will sing: how great is our God.
Name above all names, worthy of all praise:
My heart will sing: how great is our God.
How great is our God.....

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Not all is as it seems.
There is a glory hidden in everything.
It is waiting to be revealed to the eyes of those who believe.
It is beyond what seems inevitable; available to those who do not want to live by the world’s status quo, but in the promise of God.
Hold on to the vision, as we turn towards Lent, and walk the more difficult path where there is yet a greater story, still to be revealed.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us and all whom we love for evermore. Amen