

WORSHIP AT HOME – EASTER THREE – 18TH APRIL 2021 – Easter Transformation

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are enjoying the onset of Spring and the prospect of getting back to something nearer normal in the days to come. In our readings today we read of two transformations. Peter was transformed by his encounter with the risen Jesus, relying no longer on his ability to jump in first, but recognising instead the one who had indeed loved him to the end. While Paul returned from Damascus no longer as one of the powerful, zealous to impose the law by violence, but as one of the powerless, transformed by his encounter with the suffering and risen Jesus. Every blessing to you all,

Margaret.

Call to Worship: Lord, we stand before you expectantly. Speak to us and prepare us to do what you ask of us. **Amen.**

Risen Christ, you met Paul on his way to Damascus and Peter while he was fishing. Meet with us now and be with us in our daily lives so that we might be transformed as they were, fulfilling our potential and discovering new possibilities in ministry and service. **Amen.**

The words to 'Christ triumphant' written by Michael Saward [b. 1932] Singing the Faith 319

1 Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King!

Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining, hear us as we sing:

Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

2 Word incarnate, truth revealing, Son of Man on earth!

Power and majesty concealing by your humble birth.

Yours the glory.....

3 Suffering servant scorned, ill-treated, victim crucified!

Death is through the cross defeated, sinners justified.

Yours the glory.....

4 Priestly king, enthroned for ever high in heaven above!

Sin and death and hell shall never stifle hymns of love:

Yours the glory.....

5 So, our hearts and voices raising, through the ages long,

Ceaselessly upon you gazing, this shall be our song:

Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, the eternal name!

Prayers:

God of all that is - maker of things – shaper of stars and mountains, hearts and lives – we thank you for the wonder of your created world. We give you thanks for the promise of life -for what might be – for potential – for our freedom to act for your goodness, in any situation. We give you praise and thanks for the possibility of change.

God of all that is, Spirit of Life, we thank you for the miracle of growth – for the beauty of the natural world and for delight in learning. We give you thanks for being with us on our journey. Thank you for your patience and for your encouragement and for your faithfulness.

God of all that is, we thank you that you walked the world with us and showed us what humanity could be. We thank you for showing us a love we can begin to understand even though its depth and breadth and height stretches beyond our grasp.

God of all that is, we thank you – we praise you – and we offer our whole selves to you in worship. **Amen.**

In the middle of the busyness of life, **you call us.** When work and leisure, joy and sorrow make us close our eyes to you, **you call us.** Through all the living world, through season's change, through wind and weather, **you call us.** Through human creativity, through all our skills as makers and shapers, through everything we

build we echo your creative power. Through all of this, **you call us**. Through everyone we meet, through family and friends, through strangers, through those we care for and those who care for us, **you call us**. Through all that is, you call us to relationship, to reconciliation and to peace. **You call us**. Lord, forgive us when we do not listen for your call to us and when we go our own way. Forgive us for when we have said or done anything to hurt you and to hurt others. Forgive us. **Amen**.

The Lord is in his grace and mercy pardons us and continues to walk alongside us through the good times and the dark, holding us in his compassionate arms. **Thanks be to God. 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.

John 21: 1-19: using the translation by William Barclay.

Jesus again showed himself to the disciples on the shore of Lake Tiberias. This is the story of how he did so. Simon Peter, and Thomas [called the Twin], and Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, and Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. 'I am going to the fishing,' Simon Peter said to them. 'We are coming with you,' they said. They went away and embarked on the boat, and that night they caught nothing. Just as the day was breaking Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 'Lads,' Jesus said to them, 'have you caught any fish?' 'No,' they answered. 'cast your net on the right-hand side of the boat,' he said to them, 'and you will find some. So they cast the net, and now they could not haul it in because there were so many fish in it. The disciple who was especially dear to Jesus said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard him say that it was the Lord, he threw on his tunic, for he was stripped for work, and jumped into the sea. The others followed in the boat – they were no great distance from land, only about a hundred yards away – dragging the net filled with fish. When they disembarked on the land they saw a charcoal fire laid with fish cooking on it, and a loaf. 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught,' Jesus said to them. Simon Peter got on board and dragged the net to land, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many of them the net was not broken. 'Come and have breakfast,' Jesus said to them. None of the disciples dared to ask him who he was, for they knew it was the Lord. Jesus went and took the loaf and gave it to them, and the fish too. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples after he had been raised from the dead.

When they had breakfasted, Jesus said to Simon Peter: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' 'Yes, indeed, Lord,' Peter said to him, 'you know that I love you.' 'Feed my lambs,' Jesus said to him.

Jesus said to him a second time: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' 'Yes, indeed, Lord,' Peter said to him. 'You know that I love you.' 'Be a shepherd to my sheep,' Jesus said to him.

Jesus said to him a third time: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was vexed that Jesus said to him a third time: 'Do you love me?'

'Lord,' he said to Jesus, 'you know everything. You do know that I love you.' 'Feed my sheep,' Jesus said to him.

'I tell you, and it is true,' Jesus went on to say to Peter, 'when you were young, you tucked up your robe for action and went where you chose. But when you are old, you will stretch wide your arms, and someone else will bind you and carry you to a place not of your choosing' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. When he had said this to him, he said: 'Follow me.'

Comment: This final chapter in John's gospel is full of echoes back to the earthly ministry of Jesus – and forward to the life of the Church after his ascension. If you look at this story of the miraculous catch of fish,

you can hear the echoes of Jesus' calling of Peter and his brother, and of James and John you would find in the gospels of Mark and Luke – lots of similarities there. We see this especially in Luke 5: 3-11 when Peter makes a commitment to Jesus. In those early stories of the calling of the disciples you can feel the excitement – the disciples see something dynamic in Jesus and want to throw in their lot with him. They expect drama and glory - and not too much responsibility for they expect Jesus to lead the way and to tell them what to do. Jane Williams [Christian lecturer and author] says: 'If the stories at the beginning of the Gospels are the honeymoon period, what we see here in John's Gospel is the commitment of 'till death do us part.' Once Peter thought that being a fisher of men was going to put him in the spotlight, to be admired and loved, but now he has seen Jesus, crucified and risen, and he knows that the calling to follow Jesus is grim and costly.'

No punches are pulled here – Peter's call to feed the sheep is clearly linked with the death he is to suffer. If Peter first left his nets to follow Jesus in the throes of a kind of hero worship, now he knows what is coming and so takes up his calling under no illusions. He knows that he betrayed Jesus – he knows now what kind of mission Jesus' is – he knows that now he will not be able to rely on Jesus to rescue him from tricky, or even terrible, situations. Now he is prepared for the awesome responsibility of caring for people in the way he had seen Jesus care. Peter found it hard to take when he had to keep on assuring Jesus that he loved him but Jesus needed to give Peter the hard and dangerous task of bringing the Christian community – the Church – into existence, and Peter had to face the fact that loving God is about giving and not just about getting. He had been more than willing – like all the disciples – to accept the love of God, now Jesus had to be sure that Peter would share it so instead of saying: 'I love you and trust you,' he asked three times: 'Do you love me?' – after all, there is no doubt that all of God's children are beloved by him.

Illustration: [David Adam]

It is said that Jesus returned to heaven the Archangel Michael barred his way. The archangel said: 'How can you return to heaven? Your work is not yet completed. There are many who do not know about or who have not heard of your saving acts.'

Jesus said: 'I have left my friends to complete what I have begun.'

The Archangel was amazed. 'Do you mean those puny, often straying, humans?'

'Yes,' said Jesus. 'I trust them and I know that through following me they will bring my gospel to all the world.'

The words to 'Now the green blade rises' written by John Macleod Campbell Crum [1872-1958] StF 306

1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain, wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

2 In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain, thinking that he never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

3 First he came at Easter, like the risen grain, he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
Quick from the dead my Risen Lord is seen:

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain, then your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Paul's Conversion: [Mary Batchelor]:

Saul was born into a Jewish family who lived in Tarsus, a university city in the Roman province of Cilicia. He was a clever young man and had learned Greek and Latin. His family had been granted the privilege of Roman citizenship. But, more than this, Saul was proud to be a Pharisee. He had studied under a famous Jewish teacher in Jerusalem. Saul was convinced that he must use all his energies to wipe out the new teaching about Jesus. Sometimes he was haunted by the look of goodness and truth on Stephen's face as those murderous stones had rained down upon him. To banish such memories he worked even harder to get rid of every follower of the Way. If they had fled from Jerusalem, he would go after them.

One day he set off for Damascus, with a letter from the Jewish Council that would give him power to arrest followers of Jesus in the city and bring them to Jerusalem for trial. Armed guards went with him. They journeyed for about six days before the gates of Damascus at last came into sight.

Suddenly, the brightness of the noon sun seemed to grow pale, as a startling flash of brilliance lit up the sky and shone all around. Saul fell to the ground, stunned by the dazzling light.

Then a voice spoke to him: 'Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

Fearing, yet guessing, what the answer would be, Saul asked: 'Who are you, Lord?'

'I am Jesus,' came the reply. 'Every time you ill-treat one of my followers you are ill-treating me.'

'What do you want me to do, Lord?' Saul asked, all pride and hatred gone.

'Go into the city and you will be told what to do next,' Jesus said. Saul struggled to his feet, but he could see nothing. He had been blinded by the light from heaven.

The armed guards had seen the light that shone from heaven but they did not see the one who spoke to Saul, or understand what was said. When they saw Saul blunder to his feet, and realised that he was blind, they took his hand and led him to a house in Damascus, in Straight Street. Saul stayed there three days, praying and thinking about his vision. He did not eat or drink.

Meanwhile Jesus spoke to Ananias, one of his followers in Damascus. 'Go to Straight Street,' he told him. 'Knock on the door of Judas' house and ask to see Saul of Tarsus. He is expecting to see you.'

Ananias was horrified. He had heard all about Saul. 'But Lord,' he protested, 'Saul is our enemy. He has come on purpose to arrest us.'

'He has become my servant,' Jesus reassured him. 'I have chosen him to take the good news far and wide.'

Ananias set off obediently. As soon as he saw Saul, he went quickly across to him and put his hands gently on his shoulders. 'Brother Saul,' he said kindly, 'Jesus himself, who spoke to you, has sent me here, so that you may see once more and may receive his Holy Spirit.'

At once something like fish-scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. Then Ananias baptised him. Saul then ate a good meal.

Saul stayed on in Damascus, not to accost believers but to preach about Jesus to all in the synagogues there. They were amazed at the change that had come over him. But his own people, who would once have been his friends and his allies, became Saul's bitter enemies. They made up their minds to stop his preaching and made a plot to kill him. Day and night they watched the city gates to catch him as he went out. So Saul's friends lowered him over the city walls in a basket, under cover of darkness, and he escaped from his enemies.

[Later, when Saul was living among Gentiles at Antioch, he became known by the Roman version of his name – Paul.]

Comment: Today's New Testament readings show us the two leaders on whom the Church is built accepting their commission. Paul's meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, like Peter's meeting with the risen Lord, was not primarily a joyous occasion. Indeed, Jesus' words to Paul didn't speak of forgiveness or love but almost forced on him the understanding that in persecuting Jesus' followers he was, in fact, persecuting Jesus himself. Just as Peter had to learn, at long last, to let go of all the illusions of greatness he

had cherished when he elected to follow Jesus, now Paul had to let go of all that he thought he knew and start again.

Jane Williams suggests that this could be a parable for the Church – the founders of the Church both accepted their own need. Could it be that we ourselves are not actually called always to be *right* but simply to demonstrate by our own gratitude and love that God can and will forgive? If God can go on loving and forgiving the Church – which has been a sorry mess for so much of its history – then his power to love and forgive must be enormous indeed. Over and over again, God has forgiven his people out of his great love for us. What we do have to do is be grateful – and pass it on.

Prayer: We pray to you, O Lord, and we hold before you:

Those who have never known the transformative power of love and those who live in fear of what others might do to them. We hold before you, those who have the strength to stand up to that which is wrong and those who have the courage and the opportunity to speak out against injustice. We hold before you those who give of themselves to help those in need and all who give of themselves to make this world a better place.

And we hold before you, Lord, all those known to us who need our prayers at this time.

We pray in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The words of 'At the name of Jesus' written by Caroline Maria Noel [1817-1877] Singing the Faith 317

1 At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of Glory now.

'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2 Humbled for a season, to receive a name from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,

Faithfully he bore it, spotless to the last, brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

3 Bore it up triumphant with its human light, through all ranks of creatures to the central height,

To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast; filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

4 In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue all that is not holy, all that is not true;

Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour: let his will enfold you in its light and power.

5 For this same Lord Jesus shall return again, with his Father's glory, with his angel train;

All the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow, and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Lord, come and have breakfast with me today for I can feel so alone.

Send me a friend like Ananias to lead me back to the right path and to minister to me in your name.

Give me the strength to be a friend to others, and in my own quiet way let me speak out and draw others into your love. **Amen.**

May you go on into the week with the blessing of God the Father and may the Holy Spirit empower you to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. May you meet the risen Christ as you work - as you journey - in one another - and in the world he came to save. **Amen**