

Dear friends,

We reach the glory of the Transfiguration this week. When we hear about the Transfiguration of Jesus we may regret missing such an encounter. If only it could happen today! But God does come very close to us often as long as we are open to that knowledge. If we look back at our lives we can see those times – and that is something worth sharing with others.

Call to worship: Let us draw near to our awesome God and bring him our praise and adoration.
Bring ourselves, our memories & our hopes in expectation of meeting with our Lord.
His presence is all around us – in Jesus, God is with us. Amen.

Lord, our God, let us see your glory. Help us to lift our eyes to you and open our ears to your voice.
You gave your message to prophets throughout history and you give us your Holy Spirit for the present.
And you have given us Jesus, your Son, to lead us into eternity with you.
Lord, we see, we hear, we believe – and we want to worship you. Amen.

The words to 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' written by David J. Evans [b. 1957] SofF 20

1 Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now with reverence and fear;
in him no sin is found – we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

2 Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

3 Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him – in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Prayers.

Most mighty and exalted Lord, we are here to praise and worship you.
We thank you for your glory, for your power, and your majesty that transforms our lives into your likeness.
You shone like the noonday sun.
As you revealed your glory on the mountaintop, reveal yourself and shine on us today.
We worship you, most beloved God. Amen.

On the mountaintop Peter jumped to the wrong conclusion because he just did not understand. The best he could come up with was: 'We need a shelter.'

Forgive us, Lord, for the times we jump to wrong conclusions, act before we think, open our mouths before engaging our brains.
Forgive us, Lord, for the times we miss significant moments with you and with others, because we are too busy doing and not being.
Forgive us, Lord, for the times we do not treat you, or the people made in your image, with respect.
Help us to make time to see you – to see what is right – and to see what you really want of us. Amen.

God of justice and mercy, full of compassion, you have gracefully forgiven us, allowing us to start again. We are free through your cross. We are forgiven in you and have new life. Amen.

O Morning Star – we thank you that we can be completely changed by you.

We thank you that you have called us to yourself to be transformed and made whole.

Thank you that we can draw aside and spend time in your presence, worshipping you and praising you for your love.

You transform us day by day, drawing us closer to you, so that we can shine bright and be your children of light. O Morning Star, we praise you! Amen

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

Matthew 17: 1-9.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

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.'

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.' When they looked up they saw no-one but Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them: 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

Comment.

In the Old Testament reading for today [Exodus 24:12-18] we would read of Moses on Mount Sinai, the mountain made holy as that is where Moses met God. The Gospel story takes us to another mountain made holy by God's presence there. Matthew tells us that Jesus has taken three of his disciples with him, and as he is praying – communicating directly with his Father – he is transfigured, so that Peter, James, and John witness the glory of God shining in the human body of Jesus. Then Moses and Elijah appear during that intimate conversation Jesus is having with his Father. They represent the Law and the prophets. To the disciples – and to Matthew's original readers - all well acquainted with the Scriptures, the echoes of Moses' experience on Mount Sinai will have been obvious. Here God was drawing together past and future at a moment of intense reality and depth of love.

Susan Sayers writes in her book: 'Sermon Outlines': 'No wonder, then, that Peter refers to the subsequent conversation of God and Moses, and wants to build tabernacles so that God's transcendence can become immanent among his people.' [*Immanent; God's permanence among his people*]. She goes on to say that: 'peter has not yet grasped the extraordinary extent of God's immanence which has gone far beyond tabernacles. In the person of Jesus, as the transfigure glory shows, God is now permanently and intimately among his people in a way never possible before – and the approaching act of self-giving love on the cross, and triumph over death, are going to mean that personal closeness will be possible far and wide in all places and in all generations, including ours. It is vital that these followers of Jesus understand something

of this, and there is urgency in God's voice heard by them encouraging them to trust the amazing identity of his Son and to hang on his words. They have been shown God's glory on the top of the mountain so that they will be better able to recognise God's immanence at the bottom, when the cloud has faded.'

Meditation of James: [Nick Fawcett]

We saw him that day as never before – literally, in a new light, glimpsing for the first time just who and what he was. He had simply been one of us till then – special, yes, amazing even, but essentially a friend, a teacher, a person like you or me.

Yet up there on the mountain top all that changed, for there was more – much more – our eyes opened to new horizons – to the awesome, astonishing truth.

Don't ask for details – it's all a blur – but one moment we were catching our breath from the climb, and the next gasping in wonder; one moment passing the time of day, and the next prostrate in worship, for suddenly he was transformed before us – his clothes white as white, his face radiant, the world bathed in light.

It was like a divine Yes, as though everything had been leading up to that moment – and, as if to confirm it, Moses and Elijah appeared by his side, the bringer of the Law and the greatest of the prophets joining in joyful welcome.

The moment passed, of course, as all do, and after the heights of the mountain came the depths of the valley – descent into the shadow of death.

But though darkness came and night fell, through a kiss and a cross and a tomb, we looked forward in faith to the dawn, for we had seen God's glory, the shining of his Son – light that would rise again.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, we delight in the fact that you walked on our earth, sharing our humanity and being one with us, but we can forget sometimes that, just as you were with God in the beginning, so you are with him now, enthroned on high, and that, through your life and ministry, you made him known, revealing his wonder and glory to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear.

Save us from ever reducing the divine to our level so that our worship becomes cosy, comfortable, and complacent.

Help us, instead, to discern the splendour of the Godhead – the awesomeness of who and what you are – and so to come before you in awe and reverence, rejoicing at the privilege of entering your presence, receiving your love and sharing your life. Amen.

We pray for people who live in situations where God seems far away. We thank you, Lord, that Jesus is near to everyone.

We pray for people who are persecuted for their beliefs – for those who have little to even feel joy about, never mind express it openly. We pray, Lord, that you will fill them with your strength and peace.

We pray for those who are sick, that they will quietly feel your awesome presence in their times of suffering and that you will bring them wholeness.

We pray for those who have lost people they love, those whose hearts are broken in so many pieces that they think they will never mend.

We thank you, Lord, that Jesus is near to everyone. Amen.

Illustration [David Adam: *Sermon Illustrations*]

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 would like to live a long life, but I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he has 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.

The words to 'Lord, the light of your love is shining' written by Graham Kendrick [b.1950] StF 59

1 Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining:
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us:
set us free by the truth you now bring us –
shine on me, shine on me:

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory:

blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy:

Send forth your word and let there be light!

2 Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by your blood I may enter your brightness,
search me, try me, consume all my darkness –
shine on me, shine on me:

shine, Jesus, shine.....

3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory:
mirrored her, may our lives tell your story –
shine on me, shine on me:

Shine, Jesus, shine.....

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Awesome God your glory shines all around us.

Help us to use all our senses to know how close you are.

Give us words to tell everyone that you are there for them. Amen.

And may the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, shine through you and all whom you love and all for whom you pray this day and into all eternity. Amen.