

starters for Sunday

Transfiguration Sunday

15 February 2015

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Barry W Dunsmore, Minister of Warwick, Bermuda: Christ Church, for his thoughts on Transfiguration Sunday.

Contents

2 Kings 2: 1-12	3
Mark 9: 2-9.....	4
Sermon Ideas	5
Prayers.....	6
Musical suggestions	11
Additional Resources.....	12



Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Sunday 15 February 2015 is the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the readings used in the Lectionary (Year B) are those for the Last Sunday after Epiphany, Transfiguration Sunday.

The themes of “light” and “glory” run through the four readings assigned for this Sunday.

The lection from 2 Kings, which is the account of Elijah’s transfiguration and assumption, is drenched with light. (He will appear again in the Transfiguration of Jesus).

Psalm 50 sings of a God who “shines forth” and who is a “devouring fire”. There may have been a specific episode in Israel’s life that led to this poem but that has been lost to us now. The event doesn’t really matter, what matters is God being faithful to his people and his people being faithful to God.

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he also writes of “light” and “glory”. Christ has shone “out of darkness” and “in our hearts”. In the face of Jesus Christ is found “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”. In other words, that which the ancient prophet and psalmist experienced in the life of Israel-of-old has now been given new and unparalleled expression in Jesus Christ. Some still resist this light but nothing will extinguish it.

The gospel reading is Mark’s account of Jesus’ transfiguration. The terror and joy of this unique moment in Jesus’ life, and in that of the disciples shines through Mark’s version of this incident with its strong implications for the life that the Christian individual is to live on this and every day.



[2 Kings 2: 1-12](#)

“Elijah is a larger-than-life figure in the lore of Israel. He stands alongside Moses as the preeminent theological figure in Israel’s memory. His life is so laden with numinous power that he is regarded not only as a dominating figure from the past, but as a carrier of Israel’s faith and life into the future.”

Texts for Preaching Year B published by WJK Press

The tension in this particular passage is the issue of the transfer of leadership from one generation to the next, when the great man Elijah dies. The bible is not the only place where there is anxiety about “the successor”. How is power to be transmitted from the leader to the pupil?

The passage shows the close connection between Elijah and Elisha and the devotion the disciple has to his master. We can see this when Elijah instructs Elisha three times to remain behind and three times he refuses. The story moves from Bethel, to Jericho, to the Jordan, in progressive stages towards the wilderness. Elisha knows he is going to lose his master but he wants to try and delay that moment as long as possible (stay on the mountaintop?). The departure is signalled by both of them crossing the Jordan.

Elijah recognises Elisha’s fear and anxiety and asks if there is anything that he can give him to reassure him. He doesn’t ask for anything in a material sense but he does ask this “please let me inherit a double share of your spirit” (NRSV).

Elijah responds as best he can because he realises that the “spirit” is not his to give but a gift from God.

Then Elijah is taken from him and Elisha watches this strange event and cries out as many do when faced with bereavement. It is one of the most powerful and touching passages in the bible. But it is also a moment of challenge and hope for Elisha as he assumes the mantle of his master. Faithful to the inheritance he has received but called now to be himself in his day and generation. Faithful to what has gone before but courageous and imaginative as he journeys forward.



[Mark 9: 2-9](#)

“The story of the transfiguration allows both the disciples and Mark’s audience a glimpse of the true glory of Jesus. The divine voice at the baptism seems a distant memory, a memory dimmed by controversies and difficult teachings. Although words about future glory have been uttered (8: 38-9:1), the persecution, passion and death of Jesus lie close at hand. This moment of glory allows Mark’s audience to recall the baptism and anticipate the final triumph of God’s son.”

Texts for Preaching Year B published by WJK Press

The location for this story gives us a clue that something special is about to happen. The “high mountain” recalls the commission of Moses on Mount Horeb and the giving of the Torah on Sinai. The sudden and unexplained brightness of Jesus’ clothing signals the presence of God. Whiteness here indicates a light not accessible to human beings. The appearance of Moses and Elijah not only exceeds the limits of what is thought possible but also connects Jesus with two of Israel’s major prophetic figures.

However, nothing in the story should be a surprise for Mark’s audience. They already know that Jesus is God’s Son, they recall the descent of the Spirit and the heavenly voice at his baptism, they have read of his miracles and his teaching. It is something new for Peter, James and John who did not witness the baptism.

Peter, as often is the case, is the spokesman for the other disciples. His ludicrous suggestion that they built three shelters is covered by Mark who says that “he did not know what to say for they were terrified” (NRSV).

Peter’s desire to prolong the moment may be well intended but contrast sharply with his earlier rejection of Jesus’ prediction about his own passion ([8: 31-33](#)).



Sermon Ideas

In Alice in Wonderland, Alice says to the cat when she reaches the crossroads, “Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here”. “That depends a good deal on where you want to go,” says the cat. “I don’t care much where”, says Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go” says the cat.

The story of the transfiguration follows a crucial moment in the narrative of Jesus, which takes place at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus arrives at the crossroads of his ministry. He knows which way he needs to go but will the disciples know and understand. Jesus conducts what might have been the first opinion poll. He asks the disciples “who do people say that I am?” and they respond with the orthodox view of the time. Some say John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets.

Jesus then asks the direct question “who do you say that I am?” When Peter responds, “You are the Christ”, Jesus then goes on to tell Peter and the others what is going to happen. After this declaration of faith, perhaps they are ready to hear the rest of the story that the Son of Man must suffer at the hands of others and be put to death and then rise again. Peter doesn’t want to hear this and begins to rebuke Jesus. It is not that Peter is unaware of the issues of suffering and death, it is just that he does not want Jesus mixed up in this. Surely Jesus is above all this. He failed to grasp that this is why Jesus came. Perhaps they are not ready to hear the rest of the story and so up the mountain they go.

The words they hear echo the words heard at Jesus’ baptism. At his baptism the voice says “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” Now the words are directed at the disciples, “This is my beloved son, listen to him”.

In 1519, the painter Raphael was commissioned to paint the Transfiguration on a canvas thirteen feet by nine feet. Rather than involve a number of assistants and pupils, which was common at the time, he decides to do the painting himself.

He started at the top with Christ, his arms raised in blessing. He was dressed in white and he was bathed in light. On one side is Moses and on the other is Elijah. The awe struck disciples are crouching on the ground shielding their eyes. In 1520 Raphael died leaving the painting unfinished. Other artists were engaged to finish the lower part of the painting. They knew their bible. It showed a stricken young boy with his eyes rolled back. Some of the agitated crowd is



pointing to him and others are pointing up to the mountain top. The painting could not be left unfinished. What happened on the mountain top relates directly to what is happening below. Peter doesn't get it. He doesn't want to face what lies below. He wants the mountain top experience to last forever. But down the mountain they must go. The Christian life is not just the upper part of the painting. That light radiates to the scene below.

We need the mountain top and we need the valley and if we are sensitive enough we can meet God in both places.

Prayers

Collect

God of light and truth,
open our eyes to the glory of your presence
in the world around us,
but chiefly in the face
of Jesus Christ our Lord;
That we may grow into his likeness,
and attain the happy fulfilment of our hope
when the splendour of the Saviour will be revealed;
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

BCO p659

Call to Worship

The Son of man must be lifted,
in order that everyone who has faith
may in him have eternal life.

John 3: 14-15



Call to Prayer

Since it is by God's mercy
that we are engaged in this ministry,
we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4: 1

Approach

God, who comes to us in the mountains of our life,
transformed and transforming holy presence,
shining through the valleys of our experience,
warming and lighting our souls with shining hopes
and great responsibilities,
we praise you for the light of Jesus Christ.

This is a new day;
at this time of new beginnings
we come with hope for fresh ways
of seeing your life among us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Confession

Holy God, we are sometimes tempted
to believe that we can bring you down
to our limited understanding of the divine life.
Sometimes we try to capture you and define you
so that we can show to others that you belong to us.

Jesus Christ, forgive us.
Remind us of your Godliness and our humanity.

God of great beauty
sometimes we have reduced you to a list of rules



which seem so important to us
and have forgotten the grace of your presence.

Jesus Christ, forgive us.
Remind us of your Godliness and our humanity.

God of wonder,
if we have limited the riches of your love
for us and all creation,
refusing to set foot on the mountain of life in the Spirit.

Jesus Christ forgive us.
Remind us of your Godliness and our humanity.

Pardon

Here in this place there is
a mountain top gift of grace for us.
In Christ we are forgiven.
Rise up and live in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thanksgiving

Loving God,
we give thanks for your loving goodness to us,
known and unknown;
for the world with its beauty and mystery,
for our lives with their promise and past,
for our loved ones and friends
whose company means so much to us.
Above all, we give thanks for Jesus Christ;
for his love for the outcast and stranger,
for his care for those troubled in body or mind,
for his death on the cross and his resurrection,



for the gift of his Holy Spirit.

May we continue to show our gratitude
in the way we live and give glory to you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Prayers for others

Almighty God,
we pray that you will renew in us and in all people
a sense of mystery and wonder
which restores the magic of life.
Shine the bright light of your truth
around the things we thought we knew
so that we may rise up in surprise
and marvel at the dimensions of faith
to which we are called.

Then, O Christ, turn us round
to go down into the plains of life
where people despair and become cynical,
where people suffer and lose sight of anything good
and where people look at each other and see little of worth.
Shine the light of your life around us all,
that we may see each other transfigured by your love for us.

Lord Jesus, you sat at table
with the betrayed and rejected of Palestine.
We pray for those today who do not feel welcomed
in their daily lives.

Lord Jesus, you identified with the poor
and with those who had nowhere to lay their heads.
We pray for the millions of homeless men, women and children,



old and young throughout our world
and especially those within our own communities.

Lord Jesus, you belonged to a refugee family.
We pray for the millions of displaced people in our world
and for the opening of borders to the nationless.

*“Lord Jesus,
on the mountain top, Peter, James and John
looked upon the majesty of your glory,
and from the mystery of a cloud
heard a voice declaring you to be God’s Son.
Though we do not live on mountain tops,
grant that we too may glimpse your glory.
In the mundane predictability of our life,
may there be for us moments
when sight gives way to insight,
and the paths of earth
become the road to heaven.”*

BCO p435

Blessing

Walk free into the clouds
which cover the mountains of life
and discover our God waiting
in a mystery of grace and love.

And may Jesus Christ stand before you in joy,
God the loving parent speak to us all,
and the Spirit hold your hand as you enter the life
which lies spread out below.



Musical suggestions

2 Kings 2: 1-12

CH4 495 Spirit of God, descend upon my heart

Psalm 50

CH4 39 God the Lord, the King almighty

CH4 193 God is love, his the care

CH4 220 The day you gave us Lord has ended

CH4 283 The voice of God goes out to all the world

CH4 334 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

CH4 112 God whose almighty word

CH4 560 Jesus the very thought of thee

CH4 578 Christ whose glory fills the skies

CH4 583 Spirit divine attend our prayers

CH4 586 Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire

CH4 598 Come Holy Ghost our hearts inspire

CH4 677 In the name of Christ we gather

St Mark 9: 2-9

CH4 119 O God thou art the Father

CH4 135 O laughing Light, O first-born of creation

CH4 353 Bright the cloud and bright the glory

CH4 355 You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd

CH4 448 Shine, Jesus, shine

CH4 519 Love divine, all loves excelling

CH4 601 Look upon us blessed Lord



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Revealing Love](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Barry Dunsmore for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

