

starters for Sunday

Transfiguration Sunday

2 March 2014

Rev Sandi McGill, Minister of Avonbridge Parish Church and Torphichen Kirk, offers her thoughts on Transfiguration Sunday.

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This Sunday is the Last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. The season begins on Epiphany Sunday (the first in January) where we are invited to be like the wise men and recognise God, the Word eternal and incarnate, in the Christchild, Jesus. It ends this Sunday when the disciples see Jesus' full majesty and glory and the divine presence on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[Exodus 24: 12 – 18](#)

Here we find Moses on the Mountain of the Lord at Sinai, called by the Lord to receive his Commandments which were the foundation of 'The Law'; God's cultural mandate for the formation of the communal life of the people and nation of Israel. After a period of preparation, Moses is called deeper into God's presence where he remains for 40 days and forty nights. This could be a reminder that humankind must be prepared to reflect patiently in the mystery of God before we are able to recognise or 'see' God and that working out God's purpose takes time and deep reflection.

This passage brings to us a description of God's glory in human language, the cloud for the place of mystery and preparation and the fire for the divine presence and glory. The language is dramatic and yet meant to affirm that God's divine presence, often beyond human explanation, does inhabit the historical reality and experience of humankind. It is given, not for us to take as a prompt to seek clouds and fire on mountains but, to encourage us that God is incarnate in our world and in the process of working out His purpose for us and with us.

[Psalm 2](#)

Psalm 2 is a short but complex hymn whose references to Kings and Sons, as his earthly representatives, speaks of earthly rule and rebellion and divine rule and faithfulness. Its themes are synonymous with humanity's inability, or even refusal, to allow God's divine right of rule in our lives and in our relationships, with one another and between nations. In the midst of this refusal, causing eternal human restlessness that brings the exclusion of peace, God continues to affirm and re-affirm his promise of a relationship of Sonship through the true King.



The New Bible Commentary says that this Psalm speaks of the limitations of all earthly kings and rulers and “prophetically, the psalm speaks of the rejection of Jesus”¹ and yet affirms that no-one, not even kings, will find peace unless they cast themselves upon God (and for the church in Christ). God in the midst of it all remains faithful to the promise that His reign and peace will come. We will see the true king installed on his holy hill.

[2 Peter 1: 16 – 21](#)

Here we have the apostolic church’s proclamation of Christ as the true king sent by God to be the saviour of the world, the fulfilment and completion of all things. It looks back to the transfiguration and forward to Christ coming again in all his glory. For this verse ‘Texts for Preaching’ make the point that whilst the disciples were “eyewitnesses”, the author of 2 Peter refers to it [the transfiguration] as something that is heard...

“He received honour and glory when that voice was conveyed to him... We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven”². And so for the Christian the journey of faith into the fulfilment of God’s purpose for the humanity and the world comes about through seeing God in the world and in Christ Jesus the Living Word.

Here the transfiguration becomes a sign of hope for the future that God’s purpose will prevail and be fulfilled... through God’s goodness in Christ.

[Matthew 17: 1 – 9](#)

Here we come again to God’s holy mountain and the scene of the Transfiguration where the disciples see God’s majesty and glory incarnate and resplendent in Jesus. A new vision of God’s purpose and plan is known. And here, following the certainty of the eye-witness testimony in 2 Peter 1, we must take a step back and see our human limitations and God’s faithfulness that were referred to in Psalm 2. It is found in the confusion of the disciples as they are confronted with the experience of this revelation of God, immediately followed by Jesus’ comforting words to allay their fears and bring them to that place of peace.

¹ The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. Carson et al (Eds), Inter-Varsity Press 1994. P489.

² Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A. Brueggemann et al, Westminster John Knox Press. 1995. p169.



This passage is once again filled with earthly language that seeks to explain and affirm God's divine purpose and plan. As Jesus speaks of his suffering and death, this passage with its shining imagery, casts the light of hope onto the gloom and sorrow that is experienced in the death of Jesus on the cross. Even as the cross affirms that it is difficult for the disciples to hold on to the promises of God's glory in Jesus, because they misunderstand God's purpose, it keeps alive the promise of God's faithfulness that will be experienced in the resurrection.

Down the mountain of God comes Jesus to fulfil the new cultural mandate for the formation of communal life and the nations of the world. The world is transfigured by the new relationship with God which will be found through the truth and grace of Jesus Christ; the true king who will be installed on God's holy hill to bring justice and peace to the nations. We are reminded that, still, we find it difficult to fully comprehend the mystery and purpose of God.

Thoughts for Preaching

On this triumphal Sunday, we receive a huge affirmation of our faith. And yet, it precedes Lent, which harks back to the 40 days and nights of deep reflection for Moses on the mountain and for Jesus in the desert. In this we are reminded of the need for that spiritual treasure called humility. That as disciples that we still do not fully understand the purpose of God. Like those first disciples, we see but do not comprehend.

There are mysteries that remain to be explored, poor who remain to be included, places and circumstances where we are yet to find God. Like the earthly kings, we all have our limitations. And yet, the good news is that God is incarnate, for us and with us in our lives. Through it all rings Jesus' words that we should not fear – even if we know that we will make mistakes – we can seek always to develop the faithfulness of God. As God remains faithfully open to us, we can only remain faithfully open to Jesus and to his truth and grace and love for all humanity.



Time with Children

I wear glasses and it is easy for me to demonstrate that I cannot see very well without them and you could do the same. Or ask someone in the congregation to take their glasses off and then try and make their way to the chancel (with you – or another – by their side).

Explain to young people that we all need help sometimes to see clearly and journey safely and then explore how we might see God more clearly. In the wonder of the night sky and the mystery of space. In the beauty of the world and the intricacies of creation (an example would help). In the pages of Scripture and the life of the church. All of it from God who promises to journey by our side when we ask Him.

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 your Son 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 for ever.



Call to Worship

Minister: Let us begin
And journey to the mountain of God
Where God eternal will reveal
His purpose and plan
Through his anointed One

All: We come in the mystery of life
To behold God's glory
And to know that He is with us
Through the Spirit and his anointed One
Christ Jesus our Lord

Approach

Eternal Mystery
Wholeness and Goodness,
Light and Life
Beyond our understanding
Offering us the breath of life
That we might breathe life
Into a world in need of peace.

We come into your presence
In this Holy place
Where we have met you before
And have given attention
To your mandate of love
That flows through our communal life.

We come knowing
That as much as we have learned
There are still mysteries
that we do not understand



there are still paths that you have made
where we have been afraid to journey.

Forgive us

We often cling

To our own earthly rules

And our positions of safety and power

Instead of holding onto your hand

Held out firmly truth and grace

That we might journey with you

Into the world

And into the future

That you have prepared.

God open our eyes

Christ open our hearts

Spirit open our Way

Help us

To see more clearly

To love more deeply

To journey more courageously

Carrying the truth and grace

Of the one we proclaim at Christ

With us

For others.

That this world might be transfigured

by your glory

That your light

would be hope

For humanity held in darkness

That all would come



To the mountain of God
And rest there
Knowing the peace
that Christ promises.
Amen

Thanksgiving, Dedication and Intercession

Loving and Giving God
We come with gladness in our hearts
For you are good to us
And have given us such a measure
Of your power and wealth
That we know comfort and peace.

Receive our thanksgiving
With this offering
Which is given
To reflect your glory
So that the light
Of your Son's church
Might continue to shine
In the world.
Amen

Comforting God
We come with your disciples here
Like your disciples of old
Sometimes confused by life
And yet knowing
That you free us from fear
And call us to your service in prayer.



That we might breath easily and with love
 Encountering you in surprising places
 Even serving you in surprising ways
 As you unfold your purpose in our lives
 Leading lives transfigured)
 By the true king) Could be used
 Jesus) for the people's response
 Amen)

Blessing and Benediction

Go now
 Sure footed in faith
 With eyes wide open
 And waiting for God's glory
 To surprise you
 In unexpected ways
 And the blessing of God
 Father, Son and Spirit
 Mystery, Sign and Hope
 Be with you
 And those whose lives you touch
 Now and always
 Amen



Musical Suggestions

CH4 21	Lord, teach me all your ways
CH4 71	Give thanks unto the Lord our God
CH4 119	O God thou art the Father
CH4 132	Immortal, Invisible, God only wise
CH4 153	Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father
CH4 159	Lord for the years your love has kept and guided
CH4 235	God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year
CH4 355	You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd
CH4 356	Meekness and majesty manhood and deity
CH4 359	He came down that may have love
CH4 448	Lord the light of your love is shining
CH4 518	'Lift up your hearts!' We lift them, Lord to thee
CH4 551	In heavenly love abiding
CH4 716	Come and find the quiet centre
CH4 722	Spirit of God, come dwell within me
Junior Praise 56	God is our guide, our light and our deliverer
Junior Praise 160	Majesty, worship his Majesty
For Children	
Junior Praise 74	He gave me eyes so I could see
Junior Praise 99	I have seen the golden sunshine
Junior Praise 288	Who put the colours in the rainbow?
For Communion	
CH4 659	Put peace into each other's hands
CH4 664	Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face
CH4 666	Let all mortal flesh keep silence



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. [Pray Now 2013](#) is available now from [St Andrew Press](#). [Revealing Love](#) will be available to purchase from November 2013.



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 magazine [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 i 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 Sandi McGill 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.

