

## **Sermon for Sunday before Lent, 23 February, 2020 – Year A**

### ***'The Transfiguration' (2 Peter 1: 16-21 ; Matthew 17: 1-9).***

Some experiences lend themselves to faithful prayer. When I was student in 1978, I rashly signed up for a few riding lessons. Half-way through the third lesson, riding along the Warwickshire lanes, my horse decided to race the horse next to it, and tried to break into a brisk canter and bolt. The experience could have prompted a line for a new psalm. "With the help of God, I will rein my horse in!" Horses, I'm told, have large brains, but they use most of their brain power to govern their legs; not their instincts.

Relative to their physical size, humans have much bigger brains, but not necessarily a great deal more success with their instincts. You can judge for yourselves, whether we use our brains effectively. Jesus certainly had his doubts, sometimes, about the disciples. In good faith, Peter wanted to make holy dwellings on the mountain-top for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but Jesus didn't respond. The point is not to make the mountain holy and to get hung up on a particular place, but about Jesus being changed by the spiritual light of God's love, which made Jesus shine from within, as a kind of preview of the Resurrection.

This glory is not meant to be bottled and kept in a special place. This divine nature is meant to be taken from the place of revelation out into the everyday world. There's a good reason for this journey down from the mountain. Jesus's glory, his divine nature, is for sharing, so that all of us, and the whole world can be changed for the better, by the outpouring of His presence. True enough, Jesus gives us Himself in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and what a wonderful gift that is. But the gift is not intended to be cherished for ourselves alone. Jesus wants our hearts and minds to be changed so that we can take his presence beyond these walls to those who might not yet dream of stepping foot in a church. Jesus's Transfiguration is for all of us, so that people can see that he has made a difference in our lives. Quite a demanding task and vocation!

St Peter knows from personal experience, that Jesus changes people radically. He describes this in the lovely picture of "the morning star" rising "in your hearts". Peter speaks with authority, having heard the divine voice proclaiming Jesus as the divine Son of God, and the beloved. Peter counsels us to worship Christ's glory, not for itself alone, but because it has the power to change, to transfigure us - and the world - for the better. Faith, in this case, is warranted by direct experience.

If we reject the thought that Peter is mad or bad, or deluded in some way, then we conclude he's telling the truth, and that he is saying something worth listening to! Not a bad objective for Lent this, to follow the divine voice, and listen to Jesus more carefully. We recall that Jesus calls us to share our faith, our time, our talents and our money with our brothers and sisters.

The disciples didn't necessarily want to hear their Lord's message that he would have to suffer and die. Jesus also told his followers some other difficult things: that they'd face opposition and even persecution, and that they were called, in spite of these hardships, to practise humility, patience, forgiveness, sacrifice and commitment. Such qualities are hard to develop, but they are well worth persevering with. They challenge us to see some of our own negativity reflected in the people who put Jesus on the cross for challenging them.

Even though this challenge disturbs our habits of complacency, we rejoice that through our faith in his power to change, Christ's love, joy and hope may spill out to others. And in all the challenges we face on the path of faith, our Lord's word to us, as to the disciples, is: "do not be afraid!" It's a message for all of us this Lent: to get on with the Christian life, because Jesus's transforming presence is with us, and helps us to use Lent as a journey of growth. He will help us to see signs of His grace at work in our church and community, and, perhaps, through his good grace, in our forthcoming Lent course on the Lord's Prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ helps his faithful followers to know more fully His transfiguring gift of Himself at work in our hearts, so that we can be changed, slowly but surely, into the people He would have us be. Amen.

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