

Circuit Service 27th February 2022

Prepared by Mr Peter Frank

The Transfiguration

Call to worship

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3.17-18

Pray we, then, O Lord the Spirit, on our lives descend in might;
let your flame break out within us, fire our hearts and clear our sight,
till, white-hot in your possession, we, too, set the world alight.

Michael Hewlett; from Singing the Faith No. 14

Hymn StF 134; HP 457: Christ, whose glory fills the skies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xr7IYNgy0mE>

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| 1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear. | 3 Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiancy divine;
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day. |
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- Charles Wesley (1707-88)*
- 2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till Thy mercy's beams I see,
Till Thou inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, in our Bibles it says that Jesus went up onto a mountain to pray. Let us go there now as we come to worship you; to that place where the air is thin, the sunlight intense, and the view magnificent. All is before us now, and all that is before us is as you have created it, beautiful, untainted, rich in your presence in the world. So we approach you, mindful of our inadequacy before you, our wrongdoings and misplaced loyalties, and those good things we've blocked out from our minds, been too busy to attend to, or ignored. In this holy place, where the air is pure and you are close, we say sorry, bow our heads, and receive from you the word of grace, "Your sins are forgiven."

In your presence, mother of all life, saviour of all lives, we draw on you and give ourselves to you. Let us see your glory in each other and in ourselves; let us hear your living Word in the voices and silences around us and within; let us touch you and let our lives touch those of others with your love. You are mine and I am yours. So be it. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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

Address 1 – Trans-What?

Transfiguration! In our Bibles it says that Jesus went up onto a mountain to pray, and as he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Well, as a flash of lightning can be 500 times hotter than the sun, that

means that its flashes are probably 500 times brighter than the brightness of the sun... Wow, Jesus, that's bright!

Trans, "on or to **the other side** of". Roz Savage is a trans-Atlantic rower. She is also a trans-Indian Ocean and a trans-Pacific Ocean rower. And she did all of these trips solo. All alone, on the vast, unpredictable, ocean, she had little to focus on but herself and her goal of making it to the other side. She talks about how she came to these incredible feats through a series of mistakes. She was rubbish at sports at school, so tried rowing at university because it involved no balls or bats. She didn't love her chosen subject, so spend more time than she really should have rowing on the water. Out of her "mistakes", she found it within herself to achieve wonderful things.

The dazzling spectacle of Jesus being transfigured was because he encountered God on the mountain top. We mainly live on one side of life, being grounded in a world of things and people who we know and can predict. We make mistakes, and sometimes even learn from them! It is learning from these that can help us to move to **the other side** of life, that which most wonderfully is beyond the material here and now and is of God. That's where the real brightness of life is, the brightness which is the love of God shining from deep within us. We can become a trans-figured people, just as Roz Savage became a trans-ocean rower through her mistakes.

Hymn StF 59: Lord, the light of your love is shining

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAFcwns4uHc>

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 462: Stupendous height of heavenly love)

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| <p>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,

<i>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,
Lord, and let there be light!</i></p> | <p>2 Lord, I come to your awesome
presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by the blood I may enter your
brightness:
search me, try me, consume all my
darkness,
shine on me, shine on me,

<i>Shine, Jesus, shine...</i></p> <p>3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory:
mirrored here may our lives tell your
story,
shine on me, shine on me,

<i>Shine, Jesus, shine...</i></p> |
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Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Readings

1 Corinthians 3.12-18

¹²Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Luke 9.28-36

²⁸About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared

in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. ³¹They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. ³²Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.) ³⁴While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” ³⁶When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Hymn StF 261: Transfigured Christ, none comprehends

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 158: Stay, Master, stay upon this heavenly hill)

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| <p>1 Transfigured Christ, none comprehends
your majesty, whose splendour stuns
all waking souls; whose light transcends
the brightness of a thousand suns!</p> <p>2 You stand with Moses on the hill,
you speak of your new exodus:
The way through death you will fulfil
by dying helpless on the cross.</p> <p>3 You stand here with Elijah too,
by whom the still small voice was heard;
and you, yourself, will prove God true,
made mute in death, Incarnate Word.</p> | <p>4 If we could bear your brightness here
and stay forever in your light,
then we would conquer grief and fear,
and scorn the terrors of the night.</p> <p>5 But, from the heights, you bring us down,
to share earth's agonies with you,
where piercing thorns are made your crown
and death, accepted, proves love true.</p> <p>6 Majestic Christ, God's well-loved Son,
if we must share your grief and loss,
transfigure us, when all is done,
with glory shining from your cross.</p> |
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Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)

Address 2 – Is Transfiguration for me too?

Stupendous height of heavenly love, of pitying tenderness divine;
It brought the Saviour from above, it caused the springing day to shine;
The Sun of Righteousness to appear, and gild our gloomy hemisphere.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Transfiguration. A blast of light and love and warmth into our “gloomy hemisphere” which reveals Jesus the man as Christ, the Son of God. It’s as if the majesty and glory of God which dwelt in Jesus, an earthly man, could no longer remain contained by his mortal frame and just had to burst out to reveal his true nature, such was the closeness of the encounter with God in this moment. And it’s a moment of revelation, recognition and blessing for the gathered disciples, as well as one of fear and awe that was guaranteed to leave an impression for life! But how was it for Jesus? And can the experience for Jesus ever be one for us, too, or are we for ever to be on the outside looking in, as were Peter, John and James on that mountain top? We can rest in the glow of that presence of God from Christ, and so we should as we come close in worship and he walks daily alongside us – it is his gracious gift, but can that glow be also sourced in us?

As we watch further the unfolding of events on that mountain we become aware that Jesus is not alone in his glory. Moses and Elijah have appeared. They, too, radiate glorious splendour. It really is a reunion of three heavenly heavyweights! But this is no mere family get together: “Hey Elijah, how’s tricks on your cloud?” “You know, Jesus, how those seraphim can be, what with all those wings! You’re looking well – earth must be suiting you?” No! They had serious matters to discuss.

In fact, earth was and was not suiting Jesus. As a man, he was at home here amongst us. He, like us, was made for it and marvelled in its beauty, and wondered at its astounding reflection of God. “Consider the birds of the air who do not need to sow or reap or store away their food... for God knows and loves and provides for every one of them just as he does for you” (Matthew 6.26). But, also like us, Jesus faced his trials.

This is why he was on the mountain that day. He went there to pray, at a time of personal turmoil. Shortly before this moment he had heard his best friends and companions declare of him, "You are the Christ of God" (Luke 9.20). It is as if this recognition by his disciples was a trigger for the start of his preparation to die. He told them, then, of his forthcoming rejection, suffering and death – also of resurrection, but what could that mean to them at that point? We might also wonder what it might mean to Jesus, but a divine foreknowledge must have led him to see its coming. With all this churning in his mind and playing with his emotions, Jesus sought a remote place of beauty and wonder to be with God almighty – his mountain-top. For us today, journeying with Jesus, we too need to equip ourselves to face the trials which lay ahead.

How shall we balance the pressures of family, work, financial hardship, and our concerns for – and the demands of – the ill, the anxious and the lonely God places in our care?

How shall we, in our churches, face a worsening shortage of resources, both in terms of people and money, and keep our faith alive and visible?

And how shall we, as society, respond to the threats of climate change, war and violence, fake news and fake politicians, and the under-funding of our mental and physical health services, social work and education providers?

Shall we retreat, keep our heads down and give up? Or shall we prepare ourselves in faith to hear God's call on our lives above the noise of anxiety and stress, ascending the mountain to pray?

It was that simple. Jesus went up the mountain to pray because tough times lay ahead. And in that high place, that thin place of solitude, beauty and awe, he encountered God. It had been his intention to encounter God. That is why we pray! Because our spirits within us need connection with our creator, sustainer and friend.

And in prayer Jesus encountered Moses, the greatest law-giver, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, and spoke about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. Jesus's prayers were intentional and focussed, equipping him for the trials ahead. It is not recorded what Jesus felt and experienced in those moments, or how renewed and confident he became as a result of this gift and vision. But we are told that as soon as he descended, Jesus "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9.51). He was empowered, the Spirit was upon him, and Jesus was to accomplish the work that nobody else could even begin: to move through rejection, suffering and death to glorious resurrection and eternal life. Trans-figuration indeed! The movement to the other side of life.

And is this experience, this mountain-top transformation, for us, too? Paul certainly thought so, as he writes to the church in Corinth, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory**, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3.17-18). What do we make of this process, which Paul tells us is ongoing? When I look in the mirror, there's a little less hair than the last time, and what remains is a little greyer. I feel other bits aching a little more, and notice my quick-wittedness is a little less quick even than its old pace of unhurried. This is most definitely not the ever-increasing glory of the image of Christ!

But it is not in our mirrors that we can see this transformation, it is in our souls. This change comes from within. Transfiguration doesn't happen when we're getting dressed in the morning, but when we're at prayer on our mountain-tops. It is how we shall equip ourselves to be a people of faith and a church of grace, leading others to God's embrace. It is through intentional and focussed prayer. Jesus perhaps only once went to this particular mountain, and became transfigured physically in the presence of the greatest of holy men from the past, but we know from the Gospels that it was his habit to find a lonely place to pray. "When you pray", he taught, "go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6.6). Intentional and focussed. Time is planned and given for God; for you and God, together.

And as we develop this, our Discipline of Prayer, our transformation continues. It won't help my ever-diminishing hair, but it surely will stamp the image of God in and through me with ever-increasing glory. We, with Jesus, can be empowered, the Spirit upon us, to resolutely face and accomplish the work God sets before us. This is glory, and the more the glory of God shines in our world, through you and me, the more equipped we and the world will become to face its trials and discover its resurrection.

Pray we, then, O Lord the Spirit, on our lives descend in might;
let your flame break out within us, fire our hearts and clear our sight,
till, white-hot in your possession, we, too, set the world alight.

Michael Hewlett; from Singing the Faith No. 14

Hymn StF 362: Meekness and majesty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gtt52JEW_Zo

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms 239: Jesus shall reign where'er the sun)

1 Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony the Man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility and washes our feet.

*O what a mystery – meekness and majesty,
bow down and worship, for this is your God,
this is your God.*

2 Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice –
and as they crucify, prays, 'Father forgive.'

O what a mystery...

3 Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
love indestructible in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity to the heights of His throne.

*O what a mystery – meekness and majesty,
bow down and worship, for this is your God,
this is your God,
this is your God.*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of Intercession

(After each category, please offer a name or short prayer for those brought to mind. Each will be followed by the bidding, "Lord, draw near", to which the response is invited, "LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY")

Transforming God, you bring a taste of heaven to our world's 'gloomy hemisphere' and grant eternal life to all who call on you. We say a prayer for those who need to be remembered today:

Those who have made the news headlines because of what they have done or said...

We pray for peace in Europe, particularly remembering the people of Ukraine and Russia;

We pray for climate justice throughout the world, asking that our leaders may unite in efforts to turn around climate change and share the resources that you give to us all;

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

Those who are in hospital, in care, on in a place which is strange to them...

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

Those in whose family, marriage, or close relationship, there is stress or a break-up...

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

Those who are waiting for a birth, or a death, or news which will affect their lives...

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

Those who need to forget the God they do not believe in and meet the God who believes in them...

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

And on this Church Action on Poverty Sunday, those who suffer from lack of funds and opportunity to improve their situation...

We pray for all who don't know where the next meal is coming from, who cannot access clean water, or suffer inadequate shelter;

We pray for food banks and debt-relief agencies in our country, bringing hope and new answers to those who are desperate;

Lord, draw near. **LORD, DRAW NEAR, DRAW NEAR AND STAY**

Lord, we believe that you hear our prayers, and will be faithful to your promise to answer us.

When our eyes open again, may they do so not to end our devotions, but to expect your kingdom, for Jesus' sake.

AMEN.

*Based on material in A Wee Worship Book
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Hymn StF 503; HP 267: Love divine, all loves excelling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFckP0F93JM>

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| <p>1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.</p> | <p>3 Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise!</p> |
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Charles Wesley (1707-88)

- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee with thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Blessing

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

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May you know yourselves 'changed from glory into glory' as you daily pray and live out your lives with Christ alongside you, and may the close companionship of the Spirit dwell with you.

Amen.