

SERMON Revd Eileen Harrop 7th August 2016 (WINSTON HC - TRANSFIGURATION)
Psalm 50: 1-6; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Luke 9:28-36

May we open our hearts to God's Word and be changed from glory into glory. AMEN

The Apostle Peter tells, in his letter to the early Christians, that he and the disciples "did not follow cleverly devised myths". Peter was one of 3 disciples whom Jesus had chosen to accompany him to the mountain to pray. Together the disciples personally saw Jesus' face and his clothes change. Jesus was dazzling, and they saw 2 men speaking with Jesus. They knew from the conversation that these men were Moses and Elijah. Peter describes the scene as one in which Jesus' majesty was revealed, that he received honour and glory from God. That mountain became a holy place, 'holy' because on it God came to them and blessed them.

John, one of the other disciples on that occasion, also acknowledged his experience. He wrote in his Gospel narrative (John chapter 1 verse 14): "we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth".

Today we remember the Transfiguration of Jesus. But do we approach such an event simply as one of those holy things that happened to Jesus, because after all he is Christ?

I have drawn attention specifically to Peter and John because they were ordinary men. They had been fishermen who somehow were drawn to put aside what they had been doing to accompany Jesus for 3 years. It is important to remember that during his ministry, Jesus was always still a carpenter's son. He had emerged from his father Joseph's house to behave with extraordinary courage and goodness, and reveal remarkable spiritual knowledge. He became a phenomenon within a very short time by what he said and how he interacted with people. But for his disciples and those whose lives were dramatically touched by him, Jesus' true identity was confirmed by such moments as his Transfiguration. In these moments, they saw Jesus being changed from glory into glory. He became visibly more than what he was.

I encourage you to enter into the reality of the Bible. Our faith and life with Christ is as the disciples' relationship with Jesus. Jesus wanted those he chose to be with him to witness his relationship with God. Through him, ordinary men would come to know God. And through our entering into the disciples' experience as recorded in the Bible, we too would come to know God. The disciples were co-witnesses and as Peter tells us: "(we) did not follow cleverly devised myths".

Jesus' ministry began when he went to his cousin John to be baptised. At his baptism, God affirmed Jesus in the presence of many witnesses as a voice from heaven declaring Jesus as his only Son in whom he is well-pleased. From that moment, people watched how Jesus attributed all he did to God.

Before this mountain top experience, the disciples had seen Jesus withdraw to quiet places to pray. Before this mountain top experience, Jesus had prayed with his disciples and he taught them how to pray. Before this mountain top experience, Jesus and his disciples had read the Scriptures together – they knew of the great and mighty things ascribed to God; they knew of the Law and the Prophets. Before this mountain top experience, the disciples watched Jesus use God's power to heal, to forgive, and to raise people from the dead. From each of those experiences, the disciples witnessed the unique status of being in relationship with God. Preceding Jesus, others had transfiguring encounters with God. When Noah trusted God, through the ridicule he received in building the ark, it was visible to his family that Noah had a special relationship with God. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai having received God's Commandments, his dazzling appearance filled the Israelites with fear. And do you recall Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who were thrown into the fiery furnace? In the book of Daniel chapter 3 we are told: "King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished

and rose up quickly. He said to his counsellors, 'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True, O king.' He replied, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.'"

Peter himself, together with other disciples, was visibly changed and empowered on the day of Pentecost. The event is recounted in Acts chapter 2: "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." Immediately after that, Peter preached with such power and conviction he knew had not come from himself.

Let us be quite clear, the apostle Peter was still the uneducated, 'gung-ho', unsophisticated rustic man who returned to being a fisherman after Jesus' crucifixion. In the same way that God affirmed Jesus as his Son to strengthen him, to empower him for the task ahead of him, so too God poured his Spirit on Peter and the other disciples.

Yes, of course, the nature of God's affirmation and blessing on Jesus was unique: he was God's Son incarnate from heaven to deliver the world from sin. But God calls all of us into relationship with Him, and in encountering God we are all changed. We receive a hint of the glory that God made us in His image to share. Not only would others see something visibly alight in us when our relationship with God is alive, we also see things differently. As our eyes are opened to the glory of God, we will put on Christ's nature and desire in every way to share the love of God. Today and every day, come into the presence of God and receive his blessing anew.

AMEN