

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



The Church's prayer for this Sunday

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all creation
and respect for every person,
that we may mirror your likeness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 14th February 2021

A reading from 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"^(a) made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 9: 2-9

The Transfiguration

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

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⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection from Revd David Newton, lead minister in Comberton, Toft and Caldecote

There is a wonderful story in Exodus that tells of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai (for the second time) carrying the (second lot) of stone tablets which had written on them the 10 commandments. We are told his face shone because he had been 'speaking with the Lord'.

He spoke to all Israel, and then he put a veil on his face to cover over this dazzling brightness. Every time he left the camp and went out to the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD he would remove the veil, and then back in company he would once more veil his face.

Paul was obviously familiar with this story and plays with it in his second letter to Corinth.

He writes of the Gospel being 'veiled', of the dazzling brightness of the glory of God somehow being hidden. He writes of Christ as the one who removes this veil, and of us who 'with unveiled faces' see the glory of God in the face of Christ. He writes of us - who see this glory - being transformed into glory, and of how we are also simply clay jars who carry God's glory within - hidden and veiled.

Paul is having fun with word play here. God's glory being veiled and unveiled, hidden and revealed, all somehow centred in the face of Jesus Christ.

Which of course brings us neatly to our Gospel reading where we see the face of Christ dazzling brightly on what has become known as the Mount of Transfiguration. So extraordinary was this moment, in which Elijah and Moses turn up to have a casual chat with Jesus, that Peter seeks ways of never leaving, and walking back down the hill Jesus sternly tells the three lucky disciples present not to speak of it until after 'the Son of Man has risen from the dead'.

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Again, like Paul, this story plays with ideas of hiding and revealing, of veiling and unveiling. But with all play, with any game, it's a good idea to know the rules... We might well think that at this moment of transfiguration the humanity of Christ is somehow being hidden to allow the divinity to shine forth. Humanity veiled, divinity unveiled! We might also imagine that when Christ walks back down the mountain, humanity is unveiled and divinity disguised once more, like a quick costume change just off stage left.

We might think too that this divinity stays hidden and then occasionally comes out from underneath a cloak, like when Lazarus is raised from the dead. Bang – divinity unveiled; now quick put that human costume back on again. In line with this kind of thinking we sing each Christmas 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see'...

But is this right? I think not. God's Glory is not so easily confined to such lofty mountain tops, and moments of great power. The 'rules' for thinking about the glory of God in the face of Christ play out somewhat differently... and with good reason.

To look at Christ is to see a human being, and only a human being.
(If you're worried, I promise this is not heresy, it's traditional orthodoxy!)
We do not see through this layer to some divinity behind it. We do not pull back the veil of humanity to some divine thing beneath. There is only the human being.
But of this human we say, here is the very Word and Life of God.
Put another way: What we see is a human being. Who we see is God.
So on the Mount of Transfiguration the veil of humanity is not pulled away such that we see behind the human to the divine.

Instead, what is being unveiled is the answer to the question 'who is this person?'
Who is this human? And the crazy, world changing, creation re-making answer is: 'My Son, My Beloved', the very Word of God.

It is not that up there on that holy hill the human veil was taken off to reveal divinity underneath. Instead, the veil that was over the disciples' eyes was removed. As Paul says, it is us who with unveiled faces now see the glory of God in the face of Christ. And so now with unveiled faces, as we walk back down the holy hill we see that glory in every moment of Jesus' life, not so much (or even at all) in miracles and healings, but in eating with tax collectors and hanging out with prostitutes, in crying at Lazarus's grave and sweating blood in Gethsemane, on the cross as he cries 'Father forgive' and 'Into your hands I commend my spirit'

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Who does all these things? God.

'What' does them? A human being. A creature. This man Jesus Christ.

The disciples eyes were unveiled and they say God differently, they saw God in this human face.

There is a second unveiling on this mountain top as well, and the clue for this unveiling is in the name of the story. On this holy mountain we see the transfiguration of creation: we see – just a glimpse of and for just a moment – creation liberated, renewed, and glorified. In the person of Christ – fully human – we see creation becoming what it is made to be, caught up in and sharing in the very life of God.

This transfiguration of creation is glimpsed on the mountain top, expounded in the parables of the Kingdom, and made manifest in the resurrection appearances. The disciples eyes were unveiled and they saw creation differently. They began to see signs of the new creation in the midst of the old...

As so again, with unveiled faces, we walk back down the holy hill with the disciples and can see – even in the valleys – moments of transfigured or transformed creation. We see it in the moments of loving-kindness, of liberation and restoration, where people become icons and images of God's glory.

We see it when a bit of this creation seems to carry within itself the weight of glory; we might think of the miracle of birth, a piece of sublime music, or the mind-bending mathematics of infinity.

We see it in bread and wine, as we gather around the Eucharistic Table, and these ordinary mundane gifts carry the weight and presence of the glory of God. But in seeing creation differently – in seeing signs of new creation in the midst of the old - we also see just how far most of it currently is from becoming what it is meant to be. We hear creation groaning for liberation. And so, we groan with all creation, with sighs and cries to deep for words – we hope, and pray, and work for creation's transformation and renewal.

We do so because our faces have been unveiled. We have seen the glory of God in the face of Christ.

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Coming back down from the Mount of Transfiguration we see God differently; we have seen God in a human face. We see creation differently; we have seen a glimpse of creation sharing in God's Glory. May we set our hearts on discovering God in the human face, and the Glory of the New Creation even in the midst of Old.

Amen.