



Sunday 14th February: Next Before Lent

Hymn

1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Daystar, in my heart appear.

2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till thy mercy's beams I see;
Till they inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

3 Visit then this soul of mine,
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, radiance divine,
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day.

Opening Words

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,**

**and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Meditation

Take up a comfortable posture. Close your eyes.

And first, we begin to centre ourselves.

Focus on your breathing.

Notice your breathing in... and breathing out.

Do not try and control it, but just focus on this breathing.

In and out.

If you get distracted, do not worry.

But just bring your attention back.

Notice your breathing in and out.

In and out.

And now begin to imagine the air around you.

Imagine it as an immense ocean that surrounds you.

An ocean coloured with God's presence and being.

As you draw air into your lungs, imagine drawing God's presence in.

Become aware of the power and presence of God each time you breathe in.

Focus on God's Spirit filling your entire being.

And as you breathe out, imagine breathing out those anxieties and fears.

Imagine pushing out those negative or destructive thoughts.

In and out.

See your whole body becoming radiant and alive.

As you breathe in God's life-giving spirit.

And breathe out anxiety and fear.

In and out.

Confession

Most merciful God,

we confess to you,

before the whole company of heaven and one another,

**that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.**

**Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bible Readings

Read by Rick Nelms

2 Corinthians 4.3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9.2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they

were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection

Written by the Rev'd David Newton

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'. Having spoken to all Israel, he puts a veil on his face to cover over this dazzling brightness. Every time he leaves the camp and goes 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'.

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'

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 too 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.

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 the Old. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

May it not be long
Before the world we pray for
And the world we inhabit are one.

May it not be long
Before the domination of wealth over want,
White over black
Man over woman,
The privileged over the poor
Are facts of history, not facts of life.

May it not be long.

May it not be long, Lord,
Before the earth no longer suffers through human selfishness,
So that the valleys can sing again, the meadows laugh
And barren places burst into bloom.

May it not be long.

May it not be long, Lord,
Before economic power comes only with accountability,
And money and taxation are wedding to just purposes.

May it not be long.

May it not be long, Lord
Before the countries which the West once evangelised
Show us the larger Christ we have yet to encounter.

May it not be long.

May it not be long, Lord
Before we vacate the safe refuges of pessimism and cynicism,
And find wells of hope deeper than shallow pools of optimism.

May it not be long.

May it not be long, Lord,
Before we feel ourselves directly addressed by your voice,
As those first disciples did,
Who heard you summon the strangest of people
To the greatest of callings

May it not be long.

And raise up in us that holy restlessness
To get your work done.
For Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

In silence we pray for all that lies heavy on our hearts this day.

Closing Prayers

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

As our saviour taught us, so we pray...

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

From where we are
to where you need us,
Christ be beside us.
From what we are
to what you can make of us,
Christ be before us.
Through the streets of this world,

to the gates of heaven,
Christ be above us.
Surround us with your presence.
Inspire us with your purpose.
Confirm us in your love. **Amen.**

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.