

**Transfiguration Sunday C**  
**February 18, 2007: St Aidan's & Wesley 10.30am**

**Exodus 34.29-35, 2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2 & Luke 9.28-36**

As this season after Christmas comes to a close,  
and we get ready to begin Lent next week,  
a voice from the heavens is heard again –  
just as it was for the time of Christ's birth and his baptism.  
What was spoken at the river Jordan  
is also proclaimed on the mountain top:

This is my Son, the Chosen; listen to him. (Lk 9.35)

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray.  
As Jesus is praying, the appearance of his face changes  
and his clothes become dazzling white.  
That change in appearance is commonly referred to  
as Jesus' *transfiguration*.  
And that is why today is named Transfiguration Sunday.

Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear to the four pray-ers  
in order to discuss with Jesus his upcoming death.  
It's interesting that the death is named as Jesus' "departure",  
for this comes from a Greek word  
that may also be translated as "exodus".

[Moses and Elijah] appeared in glory  
and were speaking of his *exodus*  
which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. (Lk 9.31)

A first century Jewish person would hear that word "exodus"  
and think immediately of one thing –  
God's liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt...

God setting his people free.

The great exodus under Moses.

Here is the new exodus, the new liberation, the new freedom.  
It is coming through Jesus Christ,  
and it is coming through Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah are two of Israel's greatest heroes, of course.  
Moses had always represented the Law, and Elijah the prophets.  
They stand with Jesus as the sign that he is the fulfilment of both.  
And what's more,  
Moses and Elijah are the two Old Testament characters  
who were taken up directly to heaven at the end of their life.  
They stand now alongside Jesus, and speak of his departure.  
He too will soon be taken up to God.

Through sleepy eyes,  
the disciples see Moses and Elijah beginning to depart.  
Eager not to lose hold of this special moment,  
this mountain-top experience,  
Peter suggests building a tent for each of them –  
making a place where they all can stay on the mountain.  
But at that moment cloud overshadows the group,

and the voice from the cloud proclaims Jesus is God's chosen one –  
the word can also mean God's beloved.  
While these words are similar to those spoken  
through a cloud at Jesus' baptism,  
there one firm addition at the end - "Listen to him."

They come down from the mountain  
and Luke reports that the disciples kept quiet about this experience;  
a suggestion that they didn't tell of the story  
until after the resurrection.

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So, what are we to make of all this?  
Why is this man described as shining, and chosen,  
the new liberation,  
the one to whom we should listen?

Down through the centuries,  
scholars have sought Jesus in ancient texts.  
There have been several 'quests for the historical Jesus' –  
several attempts to peel back the layers of interpretation and preaching  
that have been wrapped around him by believers  
and non-believers alike.  
Attempts to get the real words of Jesus distilled from the words the church has put in  
his mouth – and there certainly are some of those.  
Attempts to associate him with a particular movement of the time –  
a zealot, an ascetic, a healer, a magician.  
Was he born in Bethlehem, or was it really Nazareth?  
What happened in the years of his life for which we have no information?  
Even his own disciples asked in Mark's gospel:  
"Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

Interestingly, the results of those efforts  
usually tell more about the seekers than the one they are seeking.  
Years ago Albert Schweitzer wrote  
that the Jesus described in books about Jesus  
ends up looking a great deal like the authors of the books.  
Depending on their preferences,  
he becomes an educator and teacher, a philosopher.  
Perhaps a moral crusader and activist.  
He is inclusive or exclusive –  
evangelical or liberal –  
a preacher or a healer –  
a Son of God or a son of Man.

Yet there's got to be a point when we begin to distinguish  
between the Jesus we want, and the Jesus we need.  
The Jesus we need is the one who is able to stand against us  
in order to stand with us.  
Enough like us to understand us,  
enough unlike us to make us want to be better.  
We are caught in selfishness and want affirmation,  
and we need forgiveness...  
we need the one who can show us the way towards it.

When we have received what the world has to offer  
and see that in the end it simply doesn't satisfy,  
we ask: Is there One who is great enough for our need?

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Who is Jesus?  
How are we to know him?  
These are Luke's questions for us today.

And the answer, I suspect,  
is that we know him, not through our efforts to penetrate  
the truth of who he is.  
The evidence we have about him - we've had for a very long time.  
In itself, it is not going to convince us of anything.  
Can many people honestly say  
that they have been convinced that Jesus is God's chosen one  
(as Luke calls him)  
by reading about him?

I rather suspect, in fact,  
that we have been able to know God through him,  
have been able to experience God through him,  
and in those moments  
we have come to realise that he is the One we need.

Mountain-top experiences.  
Jesus, Peter, John and James have had one here.  
Perhaps we are timid to speak of those moments,  
moments when we ourselves have felt  
the calmness that cannot be explained,  
or the tingling that confirms us,  
or the sense that it is the right time to do something  
and it turns out to have been exactly the right time.  
Moments of hearing the word of comfort that no-one has spoken....  
Moments of hearing a piercing word, that won't leave us alone.

Those experiences may come along just once in a while –  
perhaps on only a few occasions in a lifetime.  
But they are enough. They are enough.  
They have an effect on us that is out of proportion to their regularity,  
or we might say, their irregularity.  
For they are not every day occurrences.  
But they carry us. Confirm us. Comfort us.

We know Jesus Christ through moments of revelation.  
That is what Luke is trying to say here.  
That is what has been experienced here.  
Moses and Elijah, clouds and visions,  
prayer, and a word from the heavens.  
These are all the biblical ways of describing a transcendent moment.  
For a moment on the mountain the veil is pulled away.  
Jesus is the fulfilment of the law and of the prophets!  
The glory of God is reflected in him; shining from him.  
He is the Son of God – God's chosen.

I don't think you can take hold of that in a rational way.  
It has to take hold of you.

On first looking at this reading I thought:  
there would seem to be nothing in our lives  
that is a parallel of this event.  
Or is there?

That's a major reason why we take time apart from busy-ness...  
for Christian worship, for prayer, for sitting on top of the mountain.  
For about an hour each week  
we disengage from the cares and the causes  
of our week-day world.  
And we come seeking *something*.  
Just as Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the mountain,  
we withdraw to pray.  
We come aside in the hope of receiving the gift,  
receiving the moment of nearness with God.  
We, who do so much talking,  
and who encounter so much trivial noise,  
fall silent and pray - or listen - or sing,  
and we wait for that baptising voice.

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You will have noticed that in the Old Testament reading, from Exodus,  
Moses' face shone with the reflected glory of God  
after he had been to the mountain and received the 10 commandments.  
All the Israelites saw his shining face  
and now it was the sign that he had met with God.

In the reading from Second Corinthians,  
Paul contrasts the glory of Moses with the glory of Christ.  
What people saw partially in Moses, we now see fully in Jesus.  
We see the full glory of God.  
And because of him, God's glory is our glory too.  
He is the one we have needed all along.

Now ...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  
And all of us, with unveiled faces,  
seeing the glory of the Lord  
as though reflected in a mirror,  
are being transformed into the same image  
from one degree of glory to another. (2 Cor 3.17-18)

Let us not forget those moments on the mountain.  
They cannot be explained, most of the time, but they are precious.  
And when we come down from the mountain,  
let us also not forget that the glory of God  
can be embodied in the lives of those  
who are being transformed into his likeness.  
Our faces can shine too.