

Transfiguration Sunday – 19th February 2012 – Wesley 9am

Theme: “Mountain top experiences”

Introduction

Mark’s transfiguration is a transition between the Sundays after the Epiphany, with their emphasis on the power and presence of Christ as the Son of God, and Lent with its focus upon the suffering of Jesus as he wends his way to the cross.

The poor, misunderstanding, dumbfounded disciples (a usual picture in Mark’s Gospel of the disciples) are thrust from a moment of glory, wonder and awe on the mountain to the hard way down with Jesus to the cross. This is a pivotal experience on the mountain, not fully understood, but which stays with these disciples and enables them to continue to follow Jesus through the hard times. In the mountain top vision, God directly speaks to the terrified disciples, repeating the words that came from heaven at Jesus’ baptism at the beginning of the Gospel. “This is my Son, whom I love.” Then follows the command, “Listen to him.” Mark 9:7b This ‘listen’ is an imperative in the present case which implies to the disciples to: “Continue to listen to him, no matter what happens!”

Hence today’s experience is awesome but brings with it the reality of following Jesus may lead to real struggles and even a cross.

Mountain top experiences

I find it fascinating that Jesus just took three disciples up the mountain to experience and witness the Transfiguration. Wouldn’t you think he’d take everyone up there so that they could see the great Law giver, Moses, along with the greatest of the prophets, Elijah. Also then they could have witnessed the re-affirmation of Jesus by God – “This is my Son, whom I love.” But no, only three disciples witnessed this event which they recounted after his resurrection. Does this mean that ‘mountain top experiences’ are not for everyone? I honestly don’t know but not everyone seems to have them. I wonder if some need them more than others?!

For me, to become a Christian, it seemed like I needed such an intense, personal event. It wasn’t like Jesus with his disciples on Mt Hermon encountering Moses and Elijah along with seeing Jesus’ robes dazzlingly white and a voice coming from heaven. My personal experience was one of intense quietness, on a hill in the Grampians looking over a mist laden valley below with the sun shining above it. It came at a time when I needed direction in my life; it came after I had been examining what it may be like to accept Jesus into my life; it came at a time when others were praying for me; it came when I was all alone on this hillside and yet I wasn’t alone; it came when I needed some peace in my life.

Take a few moments and for some you may recall your own 'mountain top experiences' for others it may simply be when you have felt closest to God in your spiritual journeying.

As we come to the communion service this morning, I would like you to again reflect on when you have felt or experienced the closeness of God.

Coming down from the mountain top experience

There are those who want a 'mountain top experience' every week. Who want to stay spiritually and emotionally 'on a high'. However this is not the way of Jesus. He leads his disciples down the mountain back into the reality of life, with its 'highs' and its 'lows'. Jesus is God's beloved Son, but he is also the 'suffering servant' on his way to betrayal and death on the cross. In the week ahead lies Ash Wednesday and next Sunday in the Christian Year we begin our walk in Lent with Jesus, heading towards the cross. The reality of following Jesus means that, at times, it is a hard 'slog'. Yet it is the joyous faith experiences we have that sustain us in the spiritually dry times.

There is a lovely story I read while looking at resources for today. It isn't about our Parish but it could be!

"I feel closer to God in the celebration of the Eucharist than at any other act of worship," she said. "Your church does have a fine music programme," she noted. "However, I think the thing that makes our Eucharistic celebrations so special," she continued, "is not our beautiful building, or even our beautiful music. Rather it is the amazing 200 sandwiches that we serve to the homeless around our church every day of the week. Those sandwiches transform our bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord."

The 'mountain top experience' is grounded in the reality of the servant-hood of Jesus.

Conclusion

I've not tried to explain the Transfiguration account. In a sense it needs to be experienced rather than explained. The story teaches us to 'listen' to Jesus in an ongoing way. It teaches us that some people have amazing 'mountain top experiences' but this is not the case for all. However it also teaches us that we can't stay on that mountain top. Rather we come back to the reality of the ordinary and into that we are called to servant-hood as Jesus was.

Prayer

Loving Father, in the coming 40 days of Lent, strengthen us with your glorious presence that, having caught a glimpse of your glory, we might be transfigured into your faithful disciples. Amen.