

## Sermon – Transfiguration / Last Sunday after Epiphany

### Mark 9: 2-9

It is amazing how many things come in threes! We often say, “bad things happen in threes.” I am one of three children. The Anglican Church is founded on the three principles of scripture, tradition and reason which is often referred to as the Anglican ‘three-legged stool.’

In Tantric Buddhism, the sacred mandala consists of three closely interwoven levels – the outer, inner and alternative mandala. In life, there are three primary colors, a three-ringed circus, three Supremes, three little pigs, the three-piece suit, three place finishes in athletics and so on and so on. Three represents completeness, the first number with a beginning, middle and end, and is represents stability.

In theology, we have above all else God in trinity of three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our belief in the trinity is foundational to our understanding of God and how God has acted in the world. We know that God pre-existed the known world and spoke it into being – the big bang! We know Jesus was born in human flesh, God incarnate. After Jesus resurrection, which occurred on the third day, and his ascension, God sent to us the Holy Spirit to be our comforter and guide. The God we know is God in three-persons.

As human beings we consist of three primary components – body, mind and soul. We can hold many beliefs but we can mostly agree that life can be understood has having three dimensions. The first dimension we might all agree on is the beauty and intricacy of creation. The energy and creative synergy that underpins creation can be found in all things. Our human bodies are incredibly complex living organisms that are made up of millions of cells doing all sorts of miraculous work whilst we sleep, eat and walk around.

The second dimension of life that we might agree on is our recognition that behind, beyond and within all this life and existence there is an underlying logic, purpose or intention. Why do we exist? Why does nature appear so beautiful? Why do we form communities and why do we get sick, and eventually die? What lies behind our existence?

For Christians and members of some other faiths, a single, monotheistic being, or God is the logic that binds up the world and all its intricacies. Even for atheists who don’t believe in a power outside of themselves, would probably still seek to understand the logic of the world if for no other reason than to make meaning of all that they experience. Logic, and understanding purpose and meaning are important to us.

The third dimension of life exists in the search for the dimension of the higher power, that is the essence of creation and the logic that holds the world together. For Christians, our understanding of the higher power is God, who has been made known to us through Jesus Christ, and earlier through the prophets. Jesus says that if we know him, we know his father also. So the personality of God is known to us and understood by us to be a God of love, justice,

and mercy, a God that seeks reconciliation with us first, and then one to another. At the heart of God though is relationship. The trinity of God in three-persons reflects this dimension.

The story of the transfiguration of Jesus is a story of a trinity of revelation. First, Jesus takes only three disciples with him – Peter, James and John. Second, as Jesus is transfigured he is accompanied by Moses and Elijah. Moses appearing as the embodiment of the Law, the commandments God gave him on Mt Sinai. Elijah appears as the embodiment of the prophets, the wise heralds of God's message of justice, reconciliation and righteous living.

Jesus, completing the trinity in this revelation represents for me, the future. Moses and Elijah are from the past but have left a legacy of faith that has underpinned the community of God since Abraham and Sarah first set off from the homeland.

Jesus was transfigured before God and the disciples, in a show of purity, light and wonderment. We don't have any idea what Jesus said to Moses and Elijah, or what they said to Jesus. We just have the witness testimony of Peter, James and John, what they saw and what they heard. And later, how they responded.

The gospel according to Mark is a narrative that seems to always move along at a clip. Jesus and his disciples are always on the move and the direction of their travel is Jerusalem. Just prior to the transfiguration story is the account of Jesus pulling his disciples aside to confide in them his ultimate destiny. Peter, shocked that the messiah of God, would be rejected by the religious authorities, would be convicted and crucified, can't believe it. He pulled Jesus aside and chastised him, not fully understanding Jesus' mission.

Peter, James and John's understanding of the messiah was that he would come to save Israel from bondage and destruction, and restore them to their former glory. He wasn't supposed to die in any way, let alone a violent way. Their point of reference in life came from Moses and Elijah, representing for them the Law and the prophets, the basis of their faith.

The story of the transfiguration lies at the heart of the gospel written by Mark. It acts as a sort of inflection point, a turning away from the past toward what would lie ahead for humankind. Jesus would walk onto Jerusalem, knowing the fate that awaited him and knowing that he would have to face it alone. It was a point of transformation for Peter, James and John who witnessed this incredible moment and heard the voice of God coming to them in the descended cloud. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

My son, God, the messiah. He is beloved of God and is of God. He is to be listened to. The three of them might have experienced goose bumps, as this voice of God, James Earl Jones like, resonated in the mist. Peter might have regretted his chastisement of Jesus a week before, for in that moment he was not listening to Jesus, nor understanding the purpose of his life.

From our current vantage point all this might sound a little far-fetched but this story and moment in Jesus life has something to teach us today. Jesus mission was not to elevate himself

or his disciples to positions of power but rather to point through and beyond himself to God. We experience Jesus through scripture, prayer and reflection because he takes us beyond the story of his life and into a relationship with God, where we can be reconciled and where we can deepen our faith.

We know Jesus because the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to hear God's word, to encourage our searching for meaning and to make real to us the gospel revelations. We experience our own transformation, if not a full transfiguration, as we follow Jesus into a deeper relationship with God.

One way we can measure where we are on this journey to reconcile with God is by understanding how we pray. Prayer is a reflection for us today about our relationship with God. This brings me back to another triad for there are three ways we usually pray to God.

The first is a prayer asking God to do something. It might be to get a job, solve an argument, heal a relative or friend. Sometimes this prayer is what we might call a transactional prayer. We negotiate with God that if God solves our problem, if God heals my mother of her cancer, then I will be a good person, and I will not smoke or drink again. There are endless permutations of this prayer.

The second way is to pray asking God to be with you as you walk through a difficult period in your life for instance. In this prayer, Jesus is seen not as a problem solver but as a partner in life, someone in who you entrust your life and whose companionship is the essence of your relationship with God. You might ask God to be with your friend as they experience suffering, or joy for that matter.

The third way is to pray asking God to transform you, or your loved one, through God's love. Through transformation you might re-orientate your life to God, thus finding new ways to appreciate how God works in the world, cares for you, calls out to you, provides for you and binds you into meaningful and fulfilling relationship.

For Peter, James and John their witness to the transfiguration of Jesus was life changing. It heralded for them Jesus rightful inheritance of the faith of the fathers representing the Law and the Prophets, and his God-like radiance and close relationship with the person of God, whose voice bestowed on Jesus his rightful place as the beloved of God and God's new herald in the world.

As our own faith deepens as we surrender more and more into Jesus loving embrace, we will be transfigured to radiate the love of God in a world of brokenness and decay. We will be transformed further in our lives by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us and nurture our own spirits so that we might help others find their connection with God.

The transfiguration of Jesus prefigured our own transformation in our relationship with God and our understanding of the world, our place in it and God's overarching love. Will you allow yourselves to be further transformed by God's love?

Amen