

## 19th February 2023 - The Sunday before Lent - 10.30 a.m. St German's Cathedral

The Gospel today is concerned with how a transcendent meeting, a heavenly meeting in the context of faith, can possibly be understood. The appearance of Moses and Elijah and the transformation of Jesus' appearance cannot be adequately explained away. The disciples knew what they saw and were transfixed as their Lord was transfigured. And, Matthew and the other Evangelists that record the incident were receiving the account of what happened from the eye-witnesses.

These disciples of Jesus were expectant men, of that we have plenty of evidence. They were prepared to see wonderful things - they had witnessed wonderful things already - but to experience this vision on the Mount of Transfiguration was not something that they were prepared for, expectant of miracles though they may have been. For us there is the daily expectation of some wonderful revelation: we never know when Christ may be close to us in the person of someone we meet; we come to worship in the faith of those who seek the face of God in prayer and, in communion with Christ and one another, we break bread together. But it is not specific, we are not expecting to 'see' God except in terms of the inner eye of faith; the place where we are most exposed to Christ's life breaking through to ours. We pray that it will happen. From the very first prayer that we said together in this service we acknowledge that to him 'all hearts are open, all desires known'. That is comforting or scary according to our outlook, but should be revealing of the loving presence whom we seek, making us receptive to Christ's touch.

'Expectation' is key to this, when that expectation springs from love. People who are in love are always hopeful, expectant people. Maybe seen by others as naive and unrealistic, but love makes us act more like the human being Christ wills us to be; the tiniest acts of love make us more receptive to others and increase our awareness of the desire for God that lies, sometimes quite latent, in the heart of the Christian.

So what of Jesus' companions on the top of Mount Tabor? Moses and Elijah. Towering figures from the Old Testament. People who knew what it was like to stand alone; at times fearful; at times weakened by inner doubt; at times heroic, inspired, convinced, authentically God-driven. Using these same thoughts of discernment we read of our Lord's meeting with Moses and Elijah, two men who themselves had experienced the presence and direction of God on the mountain-top, and the vision is reassuring and expectant. The disciples who were the witnesses were awestruck, and Peter babbled about marking the spot with shelters, yet surely the important thing for them was the point that Peter made first. It is good for us to be here. There, in the midst of the strangeness and incalculable level of spiritual and emotional challenge, their expectations (whatever they may have been) were fulfilled. They cannot have even imagined something like this happening, they were not ready for it, but 'it was good to be there'. They knew that what they saw was of importance to Jesus and so was important to them. They were being grounded in the place of the revelation of God through the glory streaming from his servants. This was important for them as expectant people as they came to see that their master was more than a charismatic leader; he was the Christ, the Son of God, the Chosen One. And they kept silence. Yes.

There is more to take from this for ourselves than we might think. Let us enter the mindset of the disciples and see what it might lead us to contemplate in the Lent season that is about to open. On Wednesday we shall be reminded that we are but dust and ashes. Lent begins with extreme sorrow for sin and where that sin has led humanity and, more pointedly, each one of us. From that point of contemplation as we toil through the first 18 verses of psalm 51 appointed to be read or sung and taken deep within us with the outward sign of the ash of penitence, we start to lift our eyes to the one to whom we come - because he calls. He leads us on; he lifts us up; he asks that we become expectant; looking for transformation; accepting renewal; opening the door to hope; fixing our eyes on the Cross. The image of the transfiguration is pertinent to this quest for new life through the narrow way; the path of life is the path of testing and of the taking up of our own cross, but not without the expectation that Christ is leading us to where he is.

The transfiguration is a glimpse into the glory that is being revealed; a beacon on the way; an awe-inspiring indication that no one of God's servants, even Christ himself, is alone in the struggle with

the forces of evil. It was of help to the disciples in their day, it inspires us too to realise that the unity of all God's people is not only across the world, but throughout the salvation history that we recall at all the great moments of our spiritual journey from baptism, through Advent and Christmas, Holy Week and Easter. Lent sits not in isolation to other great moments of the Christian Year. It is the central season of penitence, but also the chance to find our desire and our expectation and our renewal in the life and the words and work of Jesus whom we follow and adore.

The Very Revd John Mann