

REFLECTION 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2018  
MOOROOLBARK UNITING CHURCH  
Rev Deacon Jenny Preston

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

My first Easter Camp – I think it was 1963 – was probably my first mountaintop experience. Rev Charles McLeod, probably known to some of you – was our Camp President – coming from a small country town I had never had such a totally Christian immersion – Good Friday walking the cross up the hill, carried by a boy called Bill Bargebos from North Geelong PFA; the study groups, the singing, the fun, and then a tall gangling lad called John Preston preached the Easter Day sermon at Anglesea Presbyterian church – he'd been so busy getting his sermon done, he hadn't been to our study group. On Easter Monday Charles took us back up the hill outside the campsite - you are now going home, you're going down from this mountain top experience, and it will be hard to retain the glorious hope our leaders have given to you.

About 12-14 years ago I was driving to my workplace in Heidelberg, around 8.30 am. I was driving west in Belmore Road Balwyn; while keeping my mind on driving I was also aware of three people, maybe a group, walking east on the opposite footpath. Into my consciousness came a voice: 'do you love them? – and I answered, of course I do Lord.'

I didn't share my experience with anyone, not until Marcus Borg explained it to me in his book *The Heart of Christianity*, (p. 155) he was describing Thin Places, an understanding learned from Celtic Christianity – it is a place, an event where two levels of reality meet or intersect, where the boundary between the two levels becomes very soft, porous, permeable. Thin places are where the veil momentarily lifts and we experience the one in whom we live – all around us and within us.

I learned how Thomas Merton, a famous Trappist monk & spiritual director, had a almost totally similar experience to mine on a street corner in downtown Louisville – US – do you love this crowd?

The Celts call it *Coal lit* - the translucency between our world and the realm of the spirit. I've since also understood the voice as in Hebrew – *bat cole* – which translated becomes: the daughter of a sound, the thinnest silence – the silence experienced by Elijah.

Sometimes the arts can become thin places, the music, readings, sermons and prayers in worship offer possibilities for similar experiences; participating in baptism, or serving Holy Communion can bring that sense of a thin place; I'm sure some of you have been aware of a deeply spiritual connection of love and openness between yourself and a loved one in moments of illness and strife – a moment of restoration and loving-ness came, a whisper of eternity here, or a 'thin place'.

Our reading this morning pivots around Peter, James and John – who'd been on the move with Jesus through many experiences since he first called them – they knew him as teacher, a healer, a storyteller and a travelling companion.

In the chapter before today's reading, Jesus had asked Peter: who are people saying I am? and they answered – John the Baptist, and others Elijah, and others – one of the prophets. “But who do you say I am?” Peter said ‘You are the Messiah!’ – This was the first occasion when Jesus told his band of followers that he would undergo suffering, and death, and rise again after three days.

Peter, James and John had found the courage to continue on, and in today's reading had completed the hard walk up to the top of Mount Tabor – very different from their day-to-day lives around Capernaum –and they'd be puzzling between themselves, trying to understand Jesus – and not making sense of it yet – because Jesus was breaking rules, crossing line of race, class and gender. When they get to the mountaintop, the unimaginable happens. Before their eyes Jesus changes, becoming at once both fully himself and fully unrecognizable. The man they thought they knew is suddenly more, suddenly Other.

They knew of the vision given to Daniel when he witnessed a glorious man clothed in white with bracelets and belt of gold, and arms and legs of burnished bronze, with a voice which said to Daniel: Greatly beloved, pay attention to the words I am going to speak.

They knew, too, of the transformative experiences on mountaintops which occurred to two famous leaders of their people, Moses and Elijah – of Moses coming down with a shining face, God's love shining through him. And of Elijah looking, listening for God – no God is not in that wind, or the thunderstorm.

The disciples reacted with some terror, although Peter acted a bit the same as when he wanted to keep Jesus healing the folk of Capernaum; can we stay longer here Master, let's keep this awe-filled experience going on and on.

Since Christmas we've been through Epiphany – the signs which gradually led to today's reading: - the signs which tell consequent generations who this babe of Bethlehem is: the visitation of men from the East to Mary, Joseph and the child, the baptism by John - all the signs which occurred before Jesus and his entourage took the road to Jerusalem.

Mark is drawing us into this Gospel of liberation, as Jesus is coming to Jerusalem, he's coming close to the capital to confront the system of Roman domination, and restrictive Temple authority, to bring the possibility of humankind loosing themselves from their current captivities -- the personal, social and economic captivities which still lure us – the captivity of nationalism, of addiction to stuff, of captivity to fear and distrust.

Then and today we have this confrontation:

Between the non-violence just of God's King, and the violence injustice of the Empires. And the non-violence way of the Beloved, against the hoped-for victory of the Messiah – yes, the crowd waving their palms at Jesus' entry were mostly hoping for the victorious Messiah, not the non-violence Beloved on the donkey.

Some of our children – now in their forties – were part of the transforming NCYC when Desmond Tutu came to Ballarat – maybe some of you were at an evening rally like we were

– ‘no stopping at Shell petrol stations and the Shun shell campaign – the Justice meetings the young people held at our place led by our daughter; and Penny Foley – yes you know Penny – well the transforming never stopped for Pen - her work is exhausting – she suffers for the way of Jesus – in her beautiful Penny Foley way!

Another lass from those NCYC times is Ro Allen – now the Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality – still part of a group of 9 lasses who meet and keep meeting and keep the flames of transfiguration burning. Reminding each other of the non-violent prodigiously loving way of the Beloved Son.

We keep this Transfiguration hope – ‘as we accompany Jesus through the time of Lent. this is my Beloved – listen to him – and we have opportunities for practicing *transfiguration* through some of the contemplative practices which are available – an Ash Wednesday service, a set of Lenten studies after morning tea - prayer, presence and worship to open us to God and one another. We each reflect different aspects of the image of God, and by practicing transfiguration through Lent, allows God’s image to shine more brilliantly through us in all our uniqueness and diversity.

Amen

### ***WITH JESUS ON MOUNT TABOR***

An Experience of Transfiguration

Here on this mountain.

Jesus  
shining expression of deep mystery.  
Sharing with overwhelmed followers  
brought to this spirit-place  
as witnessess to what is  
almost beyond telling  
almost beyond knowing.

And we come to this place  
where time edges precariously in upon itself  
Subverting our thin veneer of rational mind  
to grope the back corridors of mystery.

Here we walk into our planetary past  
we who seek to live in the Light of the Eternal God.

Finding ourselves enclosed  
within that bright Cloud of Presence.  
Finding our place to stand.  
Knowing these inflowing springs of light.  
Our full and intimate joining  
into a totality of enchantment  
in this place of resilience  
And ever-unfolding amazements  
Finding here our thinness.  
Seeing into this complexity of soul-remaking  
where our lives merge into the eternal deeps.  
Telling us of the New-Being we both are and yet to be.

And in the midst of all this unerving wonder  
we stammer with the tongue-tied  
and stagger with those entwined  
in this radical revealing of the Holy  
For such is the human on this bright-cloud edge  
Of Transfiguration"

## **Notes**

Mount Tabor is the Traditional Site of Jesus' Transfiguration.  
You may wish to read in association with this piece a New Testament account of the event  
(for example Mark Chapter 9 and Matthew Chapter 17).

Thin places in Celtic Spirituality are those places where  
you feel the separation between the "Here and Now" and  
the "Beyond" almost not there at all.

John Cranmer (Revised February 2018)