

St. Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark

The Service of the Lord's Day

3 March 2019 - The Transfiguration

- Rev Dr Barry Brown

We Gather to Worship God

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE WURUNDJERI PEOPLE

[Please stand as the Bible is carried in to commence Worship]

GREETING and CALL TO WORSHIP

WE SING "*Immortal, invisible, God only wise...*" TiS 143

1

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, your great name we praise.

2

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, but ruling in might;
your justice like mountains high soaring above,
your clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

3

You give life to all, Lord, to both great and small,
in all life now living, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on a tree,
then wither: but ever unchanged you will be.

4

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
of all your rich graces this grace, Lord, impart --
take the veil from our faces, the veil from our heart.

5

All praise we would render: reveal to our sight
what hides you is only the splendour of light;
and so let your glory, Almighty, impart,
through Christ in the story, your Christ to the heart

PRAYERS OF LAMENT and CONFESSION,
LAMENT

Deep Anguish concerning the issues surrounding the conviction of Cardinal Pell and the media cover that followed this week's events.

Deep Sadness and Anger at the horrific and lasting damage done to children, their families, loved-ones and family friends....

The Abuse and Betrayal by Clergy as trusted Church leaders.

The Increasing Anger, Hostility and Distrust of the Christian church generally, as well as of the Roman Catholic Church.

A strange sense of shame and anguish at how such things must grieve the heart of our God and God's Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

A need to Lament - with some identification with a poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945), which is found as a hymn (TiS 240).

*All go to God when they are sorely placed;
they plead to him for help, for peace, for bread,
for mercy, for them sinning, sick or dead.
We all do so in faith or unbelief.*

*We go to God when God is solely placed,
find God poor, scorned, unsheltered,
without bread,
whelmed under weight of evil, weak or dead,
We stand by God then, in God's hour of grief.*

*God comes to us when we are sorely placed,
body and spirit feeds us with his bread.
For everyone, he as a man hangs dead:
forgiven life he gives all through his death.*

concluding:

***Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name.***

WORD'S DECLARING GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE

We Listen to God's Word:

AN EARLY WORD WITH THE CHILDREN

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

The Book of Exodus. Chapter 34. Verses 29 to 35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant[a] in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

THE GOSPEL according to St. Luke. Chapter 9. Verses 28 to 36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus[a] took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

WE SING *How good, Lord, to be here!* TiS 234 (1-3)

1

How good, Lord, to be here!
your glory fills the night;
your face and garments, like the sun,
shine with unborrowed light.

2

How good, Lord, to be here,
your beauty to behold,
where Moses and Elijah stand,
your messengers of old.

3

Fulfiller of the past,
promise of things to be:
we hail your body glorified,
and our redemption see.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

The Dazzling Encounter !

[The following is an outline of a sermon by the Rev Dr Barry Brown on Sunday 3rd March 2019. Scripture Readings: Exodus 34:29-35 and Luke 9:28-26. This is a manuscript version of the sermon and it approximates the oral sermon preached on the day.]

Introduction:

We have heard two readings this morning. Each witness to the holy otherness of God and its lasting impact on those who had come close to God. Moses has been up the mountain and had spoken with God. Unbeknown to Moses, his appearance changed in that holy encounter; and as he brought down the mountain the two tablets of the Law the residue of that encounter continued to shine in his face. Peter, James and John were up the mountain with Jesus. There they witnessed the encounter and conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah; and Jesus' whole being was changed into dazzling white. These were holy encounters, each unique and unrepeatable. In each case there is the mystery of divine presence – the sort of thing that defies ordinary explanation, and for many is dismissed as nonsense. However, in biblical witness, they remind us of the otherness of God, which, when encountered, changes everything. We are called, then, not to try and explain or understand such mysteries; but to pay attention, to take notice, and be open to life-changing observation.

Today we consider Luke's account of *The Transfiguration of Jesus*. This Sunday is the last Sunday in the post-Christmas season of Epiphany, during which we have looked at the manifestations of Jesus Christ or, the self-revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The

Transfiguration is 'The Dazzling Encounter' to conclude this season. Next Sunday is the First Sunday in the season of Lent, during which we follow Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem, to conflict, to passion and crucifixion. This Lenten season commences on Ash Wednesday. So, today is a kind of 'bridge' between two seasons.

Each year in the three-year cycle of readings we encounter this story – first from Matthew, then Mark, now Luke. Each of these three 'synoptic' gospels tell much the same story, Mark being the earliest and Matthew and Luke using Mark's account as the basis of theirs. However, we shall note particularly how Luke records several things that are not in the other three accounts of this story. In fact, about 40% of Luke's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus is peculiar to Luke's Gospel. We shall note these peculiarities as we reflect upon this story.

This story, in either of its three forms, is often used to encourage Christians to find some special time and place where they can be close to God, and to sense anew God's divine presence and find new directions for the faith journey to which we are called. This is not inappropriate (note the double negative), and I will soon attend to this a well. However, this should not replace the primary intent of this story, which is to draw attention to the absolute uniqueness of Jesus and the witness to this of two major characters from past: Moses, representing the Law of God; and Elijah, representing the voice of God's prophets. The dazzling encounter of these three persons is intended to affirm Jesus as the unique Son of God. And if the dazzling visual encounter does not do this, there is also the divine voice that declares: "*This is my beloved Son, my Chosen; listen to him*" (verse 35). Reference to Jesus as 'my Chosen' is Luke's addition to this account.

A Place for Prayer.

Perhaps Luke's most obvious addition to the story he and Matthew had borrowed from Mark is that Luke alone tells us that Jesus took his disciples up the mountain *to pray*. This Dazzling Encounter took place *while Jesus was praying*. You may recall on several occasions I have drawn attention to some of the key themes to be found in Luke-Acts, both books of the New Testament attributed to the same evangelists. *Prayer* is one of these important themes. So it is not surprising Luke qualifies this story as he does.

At key points in the story of Jesus, especially in Luke, we find Jesus taking the time to pray – in a wilderness, up a mountain, in a garden. Luke, particularly, wants us to know that Jesus understood that prayer is important. In his account of life in the early church, in Acts, we find the same thing being emphasized. The key events and revelations within the lives of the first Christians came about either while at prayer, or following a time of prayerful waiting. So: as we begin a new season, Lent, and attend to the journey of Jesus as he moves toward his Cross, let us do so, as he did, prayerfully. This takes time, and it takes discipline.

It's worth noting that another of Luke's additions tells us that the disciples were "*weighed down with sleep; but since they stayed awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him*" (verse 32). Perhaps this suggests that some effort, some discipline, perhaps even some exhaustion, is required of us as we follow him; but it is rewarding!

With all the mighty ones of old beside...

We will end today's service by singing a hymn many will remember, but which is no longer to be found in our hymn book (AHB or TiS).

Stay, Master, stay upon this heavenly hill;
a little longer, let us linger still;
with all the mighty ones of old beside,
near to God's holy presence still abide...

I know many of you are aware that I spend quite a bit of time exploring family history. Since having a DNA test last year this interest has been renewed and I have been able to discover many new 'cousins' (one of whom, to my surprise, is a member of this congregation. The interesting thing for me is that many of my DNA 'matches' link me with forebears 3-7 generations back. This has been helpful in filling in some gaps in the puzzle of my distant family history. And while this sometimes becomes rather complex, it has a strange sense of helping me know who I am! But this is nothing to the story from today's Gospel. Jesus, almost 2000 years ago, meets up with two key persons from the Biblical witness. Moses, from at least 13-14,000 years before Jesus; and Elijah, from about 700-800 years before. But this was not a mystical family reunion, but by

divine appointment the great figures of the revealed Law of God, and the voices of the holy Prophets of God, bear witness to the uniqueness of Jesus, and confirm the path forward that Jesus had chosen. Luke alone tells us that as the three were together “*they spoke of his departure (‘exodus’) which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem*” (verse 31). Luke clearly wants to convey to us that Jesus approached the danger and risks of his onward journey knowing it was consistent with the Law and the Prophets. Jesus, therefore, faces his unique future, knowing it to be, for him, both the way of the Cross, and the way of God.

Checking our bearings

So Jesus was confirming his bearings, making sure he was on God's path for him.

A couple of weeks ago my ears were ‘pricked’ as I heard some geographic news. I’m not sure if it was on TV or the radio. The news was that Magnetic North, which defines the direction the needle in a compass points, has shifted. I needed to explore this revelation a bit further and was surprised to learn that the Magnetic North Pole is always shifting, slightly. However, recent shifts have been larger than usual. So much so that in recent times it has moved from Canada to Siberia, and as at the beginning of 2019 it is moving a 55km per year. Some scientists suggest that it is not improbable that over time it might move as far as the Geographic Southern Pole. That’s mindboggling to me!

What it means for explorers is that it becomes difficult to find the way to a destination without knowing two things: Where is the compass pointing; and how far out from true north one’s compass is pointing. In other words, in changing circumstances, it is even more important to check your bearings when on a journey.

Today’s Gospel story not only reminds us that Jesus took the time and effort to check his bearings before continuing his journey ahead – to Jerusalem, to the Cross, to his ‘Exodus.’ It also reminds us that as disciples, in an ever changing and challenging world, it is of paramount importance that we too ‘check our bearings’ regularly. And that is why the season of Lent is so important.

Important, not just to be reminded of a journey we’ve been on many times before; but of a journey that has, for Christians, new twists and turns, and potential blockages, all of which can interrupt our sense of direction and destination.

Close.

In our search for the way ahead, and for some kind of assurance as we go, there can be traps. We may be tempted to want some kind of ‘mystical experience’ that leaves us in no doubt. It is easy to read today’s biblical passages in such a way that we, like Moses and Jesus, and the three disciples who were with Jesus, seek out some assuring mystical experience.

However, countless Christians down the ages have witnessed to the fact that authentic ‘mystical experiences’ cannot be conjured up, or induced into happening – or they are induced they are likely to be falsely ‘mystical’. I am not denying that such mysterious moments and events happen. They do, but they are rare; and they mostly come out of the blue and are bewildering and sometime awe inspiring. They are ‘given’ and not created by will.

However, we can adopt a posture of open receptiveness in which spiritual realities can be more positive and authentic. That is why the inward disciplines of prayer, meditation, silence, study and fasting are important as we follow Jesus. These disciplines cannot be forced, but when practiced as self-discipline, they lead to freedom – including the freedom to see beyond the things that surround us day by day – to a better way which is led by Jesus. This is what Lent is about. Lent is a true Gift!

Prayers of Response:

We open our eyes
and we see Moses and Elijah,
your word restoring us,
showing us the way,
telling a story,
your story, his story, our story.

May your word speak to us.

We open our eyes

and we see mist,
the cloud of your presence
which assures us
of all we do not know and
that we do not need to fear.

Teach us to trust.

We open our eyes
and we see Peter's constructions,
his best plans, our best plans,
our missing the point,
our missing the way.

Forgive our foolishness and sin.

We open our eyes
and we see Jesus,
not casting us off,
but leading us down,
leading us out -
to ministry, to people.

Your love endures forever.

We open our ears
and we hear your voice,
'This is my Son, my Chosen,
listen to him!'

And we give you thanks. Amen

We Respond to God's Word:

PRAYERS OF RESPONSE

THE OFFERING, PRAYER and 'JOURNEY SONG'

Our God, we give thanks for the variety of ways you invite us to share our lives, our skills, and our love with all of your people – which in ways, large and small, brings hope and peace.

May all we are able to bring and dedicate to you, help to share Your love around the world, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

God becomes a presence
When we look at Jesus;
When we listen to his preaching;
God becomes a presence
When we follow Jesus,
Taking heed of all his teaching;
God is then
Known again
Shown in all the glory
Of the Jesus story.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE and PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper

THE PEACE [The People stand as they are able]

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

[Please 'Pass the Peace' with one or two others]

WE SING "Among us and before us, Lord..." TiS 259

1

Among us and before us, Lord, you stand
with arms outstretched and bread and wine at hand.
Confronting those unworthy of a crumb,
you ask that to your table we should come.

2

Who dare say No, when such is your resolve
our worst to witness, suffer and absolve,
our best to raise in lives by God forgiven,
our souls to fill on earth with food from heaven?

3

Who dare say No, when such is your intent
to love the selves we famish and resent,
to cradle our uncertainties and fear,
to kindle hope as you in faith draw near?

4

Who dare say No, when such is your request
that each around your table should be guest,
that here the ancient word should live as new,
'Take, eat and drink -- all this is meant for you.'

5

No more we hesitate and wonder why;
no more we stand indifferent, scared or shy.
Your invitation leads us to say Yes,
to meet you where you nourish, heal and bless

THE SETTING OF THE TABLE

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING [including]:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

[After a time of further prayers]:

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place
joining with choirs of angels and the
whole creation in the eternal hymn:

[Singing]:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.***

[Following a time of further prayers]: ***Amen.***

THE LORD'S PRAYER [ELLCC]

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours now and for ever. Amen.***

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD.

THE MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION:

Christ has died, Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

***Blessing and honour, glory and power
Are yours for ever and ever. Amen.***

THE COMMUNION [please move forward as you are able]

PRAYERS AFTER COMMUNION.

The Sending Forth of The People Of God

THE CHILDREN 'SHOW & TELL'

WORDS OF MISSION, BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord:
In the name of Christ. Amen.

WE SING *Stay, Master, stay* [Tune *Unde Et Memores* TiS 519]

Stay, Master, stay. upon this heavenly hill;
a little longer, let us linger still;

with all the mighty ones of old beside,
near to God's holy presence still abide;
before the Throne of Light we trembling stand,
and catch a glimpse into the spirit land.

Stay, Master, stay, we breathe a purer air;
this life is not the life that waits us there;
thoughts, feelings, flashes,
glimpses come and go;
we cannot speak them – nay, we cannot know:
wrapped in this cloud of light we seem to be
the things we fain would grow – eternally.

No! says the Lord, the hour is past, we go;
our home, our life, our duties lie below.
While here we kneel upon the mount of prayer,
the plough lies waiting in the furrow there!
Here we sought God that we might know his will;
There we must do it, serve him, seek him still.

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