

Sunday 14th February – Sunday Next before Lent

Sermon by Jenny Cass

Today we have heard the story of the Transfiguration. It is important to understand what had been happening with Jesus and his disciples prior to this event. It had been a busy time, they had made long journeys accompanying Jesus as he taught and performed miracles. There was no public transport in those days, no buses, cars or trains so lots of walking. And when they reached their destination no booking had been made at the local Travelodge or Premier Inn. No cafes or supermarkets to get food!

There had been a very challenging experience when after Jesus had spoken to over 5000 people in an isolated place, he asked his disciples to provide food for them. In the account of this story we learn that thanks to a small boy offering his lunch of two fish and five small loaves, Jesus miraculously enabled this packed lunch to feed everyone with plenty left over.

The disciples were tired, and maybe a bit grumpy and Jesus decided it was time to go away to somewhere quiet for a retreat. So Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. There they had an amazing experience. The divinity of Jesus was revealed to them.

The three disciples had fallen asleep and were woken by a dazzling light. They saw Jesus talking to the two great figures of Judaism, Moses and Elijah. Suddenly there was a big cloud and they heard the voice of God saying, "This is my beloved son, listen to him." And then it was just Jesus standing before them. How terrifying it must have been. The realisation that Jesus wasn't just a man but was, in fact the very son of God, the true and only connection between humanity and God the Father.

As I was preparing this sermon, I had a deep longing for all people to know who Jesus is. As the world struggles with the Pandemic, thousands ill and dying, a personal relationship with Jesus is so needed. Jesus came into the world to seek and save the lost. He is the one who comes to restore humanity back into a right relationship with God, the one who comes to undo the works of darkness and in Christ we see the resolution and the solution.

In 2007 Joshua Bell, a famous violinist in America, sold out at Boston's Symphony Hall. Seats were \$100 each and Bell's violin alone was worth more than \$3 million, he was well respected and well known for his concerts. A few days after the concert he was in Washington, wearing casual clothes and a

baseball cap. He entered a metro station, got out his violin and began to play for 45 minutes. Only six people stopped to listen, twenty dropped money into his violin case as they passed by, totalling \$32, but no one recognised him.

From our reading in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 it says: *For it is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

To God we are all precious and loved but we don't always acknowledge or believe it.

There is a story from one of my favourite Christian authors Max Lucado, about a lady who had a small house in a seaside village in Ireland at the turn of the century. She was quite wealthy but also very frugal. Her neighbours were very surprised when she became one of the first in the area to have electricity installed in her home. Several weeks after installation, a meter reader appeared at her door. He asked if the electricity was working well and she assured him it was. "I'm wondering if you can explain something to me," he said, "Your meter shows scarcely any usage. Are you using your power?" "Certainly" she answered, "Each evening when the sun sets, I turn on my lights just long enough to light my candles; then I turn them off." Are we making the same mistake, trusting Christ for salvation but resisting transformation?

The apostle Paul urges us not to be discouraged. It is not surprising that we at this time are experiencing feelings of sadness and despair. We are bombarded in the media with so many facts and figures that it is easy to feel overwhelmed. But it is also encouraging when we hear stories of hope, of kindness and inspiration. Captain Sir Tom Moore aged 100, inspired so many with his humbleness when raising nearly £33m for the NHS. It was lovely to see the initiative by the local taxi driver offering free transport for the elderly, to have their Covid vaccinations and the community responding, wanting to help finance this.

Some of you may know the hymn: Count your blessings, the chorus says: *Count your blessings, name them one by one, Count your blessings, see what God has done, Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise what the Lord has done.*

Have you counted your own blessings recently? You could maybe keep a journal where you record all the good things that have happened to you and answers to prayers. It can be so enlightening to look back over past weeks and months and be reminded that God has been there with you throughout the good and bad times. Maybe you too could be a blessing to others ...

Today is celebrated by many as St Valentine's Day. The opportunity to give cards, flowers and gifts to those we love. I used to dread Valentine's Day when I was younger and working in a large office. There would be phone calls from Reception telling colleagues there was a delivery for them. They would return clutching a bouquet or a single red rose. I never had a delivery but every year lived in hope! But we can all be reassured that each one of us is loved by God, have a look at 1 John Chapter 4, and there is that well-known verse in John 3:16: *God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.* An important word in this verse is 'believe'. The disciples loved and respected Jesus as a good teacher and performer of miracles but it wasn't until the light and power of the Holy Spirit revealed to them, that Jesus was the son of God, the long awaited Messiah that they really believed. They were then equipped for ministry, to share the message of God's love and forgiveness.

As Christians, followers of Jesus, we are all called to share his message, to let light shine out of darkness. It is also important to spend time reading the word of God, talking to Him in prayer and allowing His Spirit to enlighten, refresh and equip us to be used in his service. As we approach Lent this is a good opportunity to maybe join a Lent course or read one of the many books available, but also a time to reflect and listen for the voice of God, his voice whispering to us those precious words of belonging, "You are mine."
Amen.