

Sunday 2 March – Next before Lent

Sermon by the Venerable Sue Lucas, Archdeacon of Southend

Unfortunately the St Luke's sermon is not available this week, instead below is a transcript of the sermon on the Chelmsford Diocese website, you can access a video of the sermon at

[Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford](#)

Title: God's Strange Glory

'The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.'

I wonder what you associate with dazzling white clothes? Possibly a bride's finery, a symbol of faithfulness; or a treasured christening robe, clothing another generation at their baptism. Those of us who were young in the 1970s can never forget John Travolta's dazzling white suit in Saturday Night Fever! White, or Gold as liturgical colours are the colours of Resurrection, and Festival; yet, here we are, on the cusp of Lent; and in Jesus' time, and in some cultures today still, white garments are a symbol of mourning. All these many layers of meaning are present in today's Gospel – the Transfiguration. Moreover, I hear it differently as I encounter it in different places in the Lectionary; today, in the on the edge of Lent; at various points, in the cycle of readings for the morning prayer; and on the Feast of the Transfiguration itself – 6th August. There is a huge irony in that date, because it is also Hiroshima Day – the day when the sky of that Japanese city was lit up in a different, and horrific way.

We're up a mountain; the place, in the Hebrew Scriptures, of encounter with God; and Moses comes away from that encounter with his face shining, as we read in Exodus. The cloud overshadows the entire scene; echoes again of the God who speaks from the cloud and sets his people free. It is a fearful and wonderful thing to encounter the living God.

Yet, this is a strange glory; for Moses and Elijah are 'speaking of his departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.' The Human One, in whom God's glory is revealed today, sets his face to Jerusalem, and to the passion he must undergo.

Peter and James do see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ on the mountain. They are afraid; they are, perhaps, a bit overwhelmed; they are aware of its significance, but not of what that significance might be. Peter's first response is to fall back on what is familiar, on tradition; his offer to make booths for Jesus, Moses and Elijah is a reference to the Jewish feast of Succoth or booths, a feast of the Exodus, in which God's people dwell in booths for a week. Yet, while today's Gospel shows them, and us, the glory of God in the face of the Jesus Christ who must suffer, and die and rise again, as the new Moses, the new Elijah, the prophet who must go up to Jerusalem to accomplish his purpose, something more than Moses and Elijah is here, that goes beyond the familiar tradition for which Peter reaches.

We're hearing today's Gospel as the world stands in a dark and dangerous place, in which wars and rumours of wars seem ever present; and in which, perhaps, the challenges that confront our own church make us feel vulnerable or even overwhelmed.

How are we, as Christians, to respond? Today's readings speak to us with relevance, power, encouragement and hope.

First, our psalm reminds us that it is God who is Sovereign – not us, and certainly not the 'powers that be' of this world; it is God that is sovereign, and he is a God who answers prayer, who pardons, encourages and heals both people and nations:

'they called upon the Lord and he answered them;...you were a God who forgave them and pardoned them for their offences.' God is a God not of war, nor yet of power as the world sees it, but of love, whose victory in Christ is, finally, a victory over all war and violence, of the worst humanity can do to ourselves and one another.

And second, God in Christ reveals that love, that splendour and majesty prefigured today, as victory over violence and death; the one who went up to Jerusalem and there died a horrendous death outside the city is raised to fullness of eternal life – not with revenge, but with a love that transforms victim and aggressor alike. In the Transfiguration, we see that glory of power made perfect in weakness; for the point of the garment of dazzling white is,

here, on the cusp of Lent, we hear about Jesus preparing his disciples for his passion.

Like Peter, confronted with God's strange glory - we might want to fall back on the familiar, and yes, even be tempted to put God in a box.

But sometimes we are simply called to abide, to be with an experience of God that is outside anything we know or can make sense of; as Peter, John and James were called to abide with their Lord, here at the Transfiguration and later, in Gethsemane – to abide in overwhelming glory of the presence of God; or, perhaps, like Mary and John later at the foot of the Cross, to stand in the senselessness and fear – in solidarity with all for whom life is senseless, or fearful or overwhelming.

And, we are called to witness that Christ is God's great 'and yet'; across the wreckage of history, across the paradoxes and struggles of our own time God's Spirit still broods; and in Jesus, the new Moses, the new Elijah, the crucified one, all power and violence is finally and comprehensively overcome in love, and the glory of the Lord is made visible. That is the hope that is within us, and that is the hope to which we are called; for since it is by God's mercy we have the privilege – all of us – of being engaged in this ministry, so we do not lose heart; for this hope comes from the Lord, the Spirit. Amen.