

Transfiguration

2 March 2014

Exodus 24: 12-18; 2Peter 1: 16-21; Matthew 17: 1-9

Live into your transfiguration

There is a quaint saying used in many contexts, it is 'hurry up and wait'. In the army context, the troops all rush around like hairy goats getting everything ready and then when everything is organised and ready, and everyone is in place, you all just sit there 'in a sort of holding pattern' and wait for the next order, or the instruction to proceed. Robert encountered this practice many years ago when he was on exercise travelling, with both air force and army, in convoy, from Townsville to Curtin in WA. One morning 'somewhere in central Queensland' they had all readied themselves and piled into their trucks, all lined up in convoy and ... then they sat there, all waiting, for about 20 minutes till the order to move was given. Everyone was ready, all the trucks were packed and ready, nothing else needed to be done, yet they had to just sit there until 'someone' decided the time had come to start moving. Moses had this same, 'hurry up and wait', in our first reading this morning. He is called by God to go up the mountain, he gets up there and he waits, he waits for 6 days, then on the seventh day, God speaks out of the cloud. You know, he must have been very patient. How many of us would still be waiting six days later? I must admit, I don't do 'wait' very well, although I am learning. For me, you called, I'm here, let's get on with it.

This Transfiguration Sunday, all three of our readings speak of a similar theme, a similar message. God's transfiguration in the lives of all who follow God. Moses was changed by this experience of God's self-revelation. After spending 30 days in the cloud with God, Moses' face 'shone', and every time after that when he entered the 'tent of meeting' to be in the presence of God, his face shone, so much so that it frightened all those who saw it and he found it necessary to put a veil over his face to avoid frightening them. Jesus' shone when he also climbed a mountain to be in the presence of God. Those with Jesus also were frightened. Peter was one of those who witnessed this transfiguration and, although prior to this event, when Jesus had told them that he was to suffer and die and Peter had railed against this idea, after the resurrection he understood what Jesus was trying to tell them. Our second reading this morning records Peter witnessing to this event, he is telling the people to whom the letter is written that Christianity is not based on myths but on eyewitness accounts. The wiser Peter now advises 'you will be wise to be attentive to this', wait, listen, pay attention. Peter is reminding the people, and he is reminding us of the power of listening to God together, in community. Of the power of waiting, waiting on the presence of God, listening to what God is saying to us in our lives, being attentive to the movement of the Spirit in our lives. The words we hear in scripture, the experiences of worship and service are not meant to be solo acts, sharing the Christian message is not to be done in isolation. We need each other.

But what is transfiguration? Is it just 'lighting up' in the way Jesus did? If so, I am not sure any of us has been, or even wants to be, transfigured. Yet we have all, in some way or other, been transfigured by our 'coming close' to God, by our 'encounter with the holy'. We have been changed, we have undergone a change in our character, a change in the way we act, a change in the way we live our lives. The word transfiguration simply means 'change'. Our problem is, sometimes we get so caught up in trying to explain what happened to Jesus, how it looked, how it happened, that we lose sight of the simplicity of the act.

Let us for a minute think about the sky in summer as the sun is setting. The sky is full of reds and purples and oranges. The sky is dramatic and beautiful. But how do we explain what we are seeing, how do we put this scene into words. Can we say, it is a reflection of the beauty of creation as God has made it, or do we just say, well it is just the sun reflecting off the dust particles and moisture in the atmosphere? Our human way of thinking has us looking for this 'dust particles and moisture' explanation for the transfiguration, but there isn't one. Looking for it distracts us from seeing the important things which are happening in this story. There is a cloud, something happens and Jesus glows in a way which reflects the glory of God, Moses and Elijah appear and speak to Jesus, a voice thunders from the cloud saying 'this is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased, listen to Him', then it is all over, Jesus reaches out and touches the disciples and tells them everything is ok. If we keep looking for the 'dust particles and moisture' explanation, we lose sight of Jesus and God's holiness, God's beauty and more importantly, God's love.

At the end of our Gospel, Jesus tells his three witnesses not to tell anyone about what they saw 'until the son of man has been raised from the dead'. A couple of important things need to be considered here. The first being, who in their right mind is going to believe them anyway. For the disciples to try to tell anyone about what they saw would be the first century equivalent you saying you have been 'abducted by aliens'. At best people think you are a bit of a 'fruit cake', at worst, they truck you off to the nearest mental health assessment centre. So Jesus says, just keep it to yourselves. But, after the resurrection, this day on the mountain becomes another piece of evidence about who Jesus was and is, and what God was and is doing through him. So we see Peter using what he has seen and heard today to back up his preaching about Jesus and the resurrection.

As I have said earlier, most of us can find ways in which our lives have been changed, transfigured, transformed, by the presence of the holy in our lives. Not necessarily dramatic changes, although some do have dramatic changes, but sometimes the change is so subtle we don't notice them until someone else asks about why we do what we do, or why we no longer do what we used to do. But we have been changed, we have been 'transfigured' by having Christ in our lives. Most of us will find we have been 'smoothed out' 'reshaped' 'formed more and more into the image of Christ'. And because of this transformation, this transfiguring, we, like Peter, are called to tell the story of our encounter with the holy. Not

from the roof tops, not from the street corners, but through the way we live our lives. Tell the story of who God is for you by the way you live.

The words heard on the mountain top were also heard at Jesus baptism. This is my beloved son, in whom I am pleased. They are also the words said at our baptism, this is my beloved son/daughter in whom I am pleased. God is pleased with you, God is pleased with me, God is pleased with the two children who will be baptised this morning. Live into this promise, keep transfiguring as your encounter with the holy continues.

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