

Christchurch live stream service 14 February 2021 at 10.45

Worship Leader: Jennifer Rogers

Reader: Alison Bryan

Musicians: Andy Searle

Technician: John Hamblin

We gather together in our own homes, separately but together in the Spirit to worship our ever loving God and give him all honour and praise.

Opening Prayer:

Lord of all time and eternity, your people through the ages have met with you on a mountain-top.

Today, we journey in prayer to the mountain and ask you to meet us; to accept our worship, to inspire our praise and to increase our sense of awe and wonder, for you are our great God and King, transfigured and transfiguring.

May we be united in love, set alight by your Spirit and through the grace of your Son, Jesus Christ, may we find ways to glimpse your glory. Amen.

Hymn StF 15: The Splendour of the King

The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty
Let all the Earth rejoice, all the Earth rejoice
He wraps himself in light
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Age to age He stands and time is in His hands
Beginning and the end, beginning and the end
The Godhead Three in One, Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb.

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Name above all names, worthy of our praise
My heart will sing, how great is our God
Name above all names, worthy of our praise
My heart will sing, how great is our God.

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God

Prayers of Praise and Adoration:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we come to praise and worship you because you deserve all the praise that we can give.

We glimpse your glory in our world that you created. When we take time to look we are amazed at the beauty we see in your creation and know what a great God you are. We praise and adore you.

You sent Jesus to be our Saviour. He came to live amongst us. In Jesus we see your glory; through Jesus heaven touched earth. Because of Jesus, we can reach out to you and know that our prayers are heard. We praise and adore you.

You send your Holy Spirit to draw us to yourself, and by your spirit, you are with us now. We have not climbed a mountain, but we have come away from ordinary life, to encounter your presence and glimpse your glory. We praise and adore you.

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We praise and adore you, now and always. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your Name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done, on earth as it is 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 forever. Amen.

Introduction:

In all three years of the lectionary, the Gospel passage appointed for today, the Sunday before Lent is the account of the Transfiguration. Set at this point in the year, the passage helps us look both backwards and forwards.

We look back to the season of Epiphany and in particular to Christ's baptism.

We look forward to Easter as the glory of the Transfiguration anticipates the Resurrection.

Between past and future we make our way through Lent, as Jesus comes down from the mountain to head to the death he speaks of during that descent.

Just as Peter, James and John climbed a mountain, we too are invited on this Sunday to figuratively climb the mountain of faith to seek God and his purposes for us. We too are invited to glimpse the glory of God and wonder at the mystery and holiness of our awesome God.

As we listen to the account of the Transfiguration from Mark's Gospel, let's try and hear the scripture with our imaginations – you may find this easier if you close your eyes.

Bible Reading: Mark 9: 2-9 (NIVUK)

²After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' ⁶(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'

⁸Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection:

It started off like any ordinary day. Jesus and his three closest disciples – Peter, James and John – went up a high mountain. There was nothing unusual about that. Jesus often went off from the crowds to pray and rest. It's what he did – all very ordinary.

But from then onwards it wasn't ordinary at all. No sooner had they arrived when Jesus was suddenly transfigured. His clothes became dazzling white, such that no one on earth could bleach them.

Not only out of the ordinary, but absolutely out of this world!

And if that was not enough, two of the most famous Israelite figures from the past suddenly appeared at Jesus' side. Moses, the supreme law giver, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets – the Law and the Prophets – paying respect to Jesus, in whom both are brought together.

This was both literally and figuratively a 'mountain-top experience.' No wonder Peter, James and John were terrified. Even so, Peter wanted to capture the moment, pin it down, commemorate the event and erect some shrines. We might have wanted to take a photograph or video what was happening.

If all that had happened so far was not out of this world enough, - then a cloud overshadowed the mountain and a voice from the cloud echoed around the disciples saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him.' That must have been truly awesome!

But then, as suddenly as it had come, the moment faded and it was all over. The disciples looked up and only Jesus was there. Peter, James and John had seen Jesus in his full glory but soon afterwards they were headed back down the mountain. Jesus told them to tell no one about what they had seen. That made sense. Who would have believed it anyway? But I'm sure the three of them believed it. They wouldn't fully understand until after the resurrection had taken place but those moments on that mountain would forever mark their lives and change the way they looked at everything. Certain 'WOW' moments have a way of doing that.

Martin Luther King Junior knew that. He concluded his last sermon the day before he was assassinated with these words:

'I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind – like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place – but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain – and I've looked over the Promised Land – and I'm happy tonight. I may not get there with you but I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight – I'm not worried about anything – I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.'

We are not all entrusted with an out of this world experience of God's presence with us or an unexpected revelation of God's glory in the midst of our ordinary lives, but most of us, I suspect have special memories of times and places when we have felt God very close to us and have glimpsed his glory.

As we look back over our journey of faith and recall those times, can we also consider where we can glimpse God's glory in the here and now, in the middle of a pandemic? Or, have we lost the expectation that we will glimpse the glory of God? Are we no longer confident that God is with us so that we do not always recognise him, particularly in the ordinary, unexpected or difficult places?

There are some times and places where I find it easy to glimpse the glory of God. In particular, when I gaze at the beauty of our world and even when we can't travel far, if we look for it we can see the wonders of God's creation, close by, even from our own homes – a beautiful sunset, a rainbow in the sky, snowdrops in our garden etc. etc. – the list is endless.

I glimpse the glory of God in other people – in their generosity and love and we've seen and heard about so many wonderful examples of loving kindness during this last year. For example, the compassion shown by NHS staff and care workers and the loving service given by many volunteers to the poor, lonely and abused. Not to mention the inspiration people like Captain Tom have given to us all.

I glimpse God's glory when I share with family and friends at times of great joy in their lives, for example at the birth of a baby, even if it is only through photographs, videos or on Zoom.

I glimpse the glory of God in the wonders of science, in the production of the Covid-19 vaccines and see the hand of God in the decision of AstraZeneca to not make a profit from the production of the Oxford vaccine.

I glimpse the glory of God in inspirational, passionate worship, and I have found as time has gone on that this can be in virtual worship if we allow ourselves to be 'lost in wonder, love and praise'.

It is good for us to consider what enables us to go up the mountain and see the glory of God. What takes us outside the ordinary and enriches our lives? The Transfiguration reminds us of the possibility of change and holiness in our own lives if we think carefully about what 'transfigures' us and pursue those things to bring us closer to God.

Jesus was facing the long journey to the Cross; he knew his death was only weeks away.

As unlikely as it may seem, the Bible tells us that to be like Jesus is our destiny; that the intention of God in his calling of us is to make us like him. We are destined for glory.

But first, as with Jesus, there is a cross to bear. And so, each year, we climb the mountain of Transfiguration with him. We climb to share the vision that Peter, James and John saw, and to be strengthened by it for our return to the valleys and for the days before we receive the fullness of the glory that Jesus gives to us through his death and resurrection.

As we prepare to bring ourselves into the disciplined walk of faith and devotion during Lent, we remember this glory of God that calls us. The mountain of Transfiguration reminds us that though Jesus walked in the way of the Cross, he also rose from the dead in the glory of the Father. Everything we do in Lent brings us a step closer to the joys of Easter, a step closer to God.

Prayer of confession:

Gracious and loving God,

Forgive us our selfish concerns with earthly things and our failure to acknowledge your glory in the face of Jesus; for our blindness to the wonder of your presence in our lives.

When you give us glimpses of your glory, we want them to last forever and keep them to ourselves. Forgive us for failing to show your glory to everyone we meet.

Forgive us that even though we call you Lord, we so often fail to listen to you. Too often our ears are deaf to your call and we fail to serve you as faithful disciples.

God of transfiguration, you meet us in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary moments of life, even though we admit that so often we don't recognise you. We pray that your glory and love may shine in our hearts and throughout the world, so that all may be transfigured in and through Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

Silence

A voice from the cloud said 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'

Hear now the words of Jesus. Your sins are forgiven. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn StF 260: Swiftly pass the clouds of glory

Swiftly pass the clouds of glory,
Heaven's voice, the dazzling light;
Moses and Elijah vanish;
Christ alone commands the height!
Peter, James and John fall silent,
Turning from the summit rise
Downward toward the shadowed valley
Where the Lord has fixed his eyes.

Glimpsed and gone the revelation,
They shall gain and keep its truth,
Not by building on the mountain
Any shrine or sacred booth,
But by following the Saviour
Through the valley to the Cross
And by testing faith's resilience
Through betrayal, pain, and loss.

Lord, transfigure our perception
With the purest light that shines

And recast our life's intentions
To the shape of our designs.
Till we seek no other glory
Than what lies past Calvary's hill
And our living and our dying
And our rising by your will.

Prayers of Intercession:

God of glory, we pray for the governments around the world as they take measures to combat the spread and effects of Covid-19. We ask that you will give them wisdom to make the best decisions to help their population through this pandemic.

We pray for those who have experienced the direct effects of this virus and are struggling to regain their health. May they be helped to recover? We remember those who have lost loved ones and are mourning. May they receive your comfort? We pray for those who because of movement and meeting restrictions are finding life lonely. May they know that you are walking this road with them? We pray for those who are finding it difficult to pay their way because they have been made redundant, or their working week has been reduced or they are not getting as much business as they used to. May they find the help to make ends meet?

In a moment of silence we name before you those known personally to us who are suffering in any way today.

(Silence)

We pray that the church will be light in these dark times, being Christ's hands and feet, caring for those around us and enabling them to see your glory in all we do.

We pray for all the churches in Hitchin and in the North Hertfordshire Circuit. May our churches bring hope to people where they cannot see a way forward? Help us to show how precious all people are in your eyes.

God of glory, we pray for ourselves as your disciples. We thank you for all that Jesus has done for us.

Make us strong by your Holy Spirit, so that we may be faithful disciples loving you and loving others as ourselves.

Help us to encourage each other, and to share your love.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen

Hymn StF 82: How great thou art!

O Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee

How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee

How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze

And when I think that God His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die-I scarce can take it in
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home-what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, on the mountain top, Peter, James and John looked upon the majesty of your glory and from the mystery of a cloud heard a voice declaring you to be God's Son.

Though we do not live on mountain tops, grant that we too may glimpse your glory.

In the mundane predictability of our ordinary lives may there be moments when sight gives way to insight and the paths of earth become the road to heaven.

AMEN.

The Northumbrian Blessing *(Recording of Mandy singing this)*

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you,
wherever He may send you.

May He guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.

May He bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders He has shown you.

May He bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors?