

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Last Sunday after Epiphany – Transfiguration C

Sunday 3 March 2019 (8am)

'His face changed'

Faces are windows on the soul.

There are faces that glow there.

There are faces that are open, faces that are closed.

Faces that are soft, others that are hard.

Have you seen a face change, transformed?

Often when I see a wedding couple before me making their vows their faces seem to glow with the love between them, so also when you see a parent with their child gazing at each other.

So it was when Jesus took Peter and John up a mountain to pray and as he prayed the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white.

Only Luke puts it so visually, that the transfiguration was about Jesus' face changing as well as his clothes.

Only Luke puts it in the context of prayer.

The transfiguration is an intriguing story. It is like a bridge between Jesus' baptism and his resurrection.

Here is Jesus revealed with glowing face. Moses and Elijah appear with him in glory talking of his departure, sleepy disciples almost miss it. There's the overshadowing cloud and the command addressed to the disciples to listen to the chosen one.

Finally there is the resounding silence of the disciples as they head back down into the valley where Jesus reveals his power to heal the boy with the demon.

Today we celebrate the pinnacle of Epiphany in the transfiguration of Jesus – the revealing of Jesus in glory as God's chosen one.

As we see him we glimpse through the mystery of clouds and the heavenly voice earth and heaven meeting and Jesus' dazzling glory. Yet there is also the overshadowing of what it means for Jesus to be the light bearer and bringer of freedom and release for all.

As Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet walk with him they talk with him of his imminent departure – the Greek word is actually exodus which echoes the ancient journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the promised land. Jesus' journey is an exodus to bring freedom for all as he sets his face towards his dying and rising in Jerusalem.

This mountain top experience is not just about glory and mystery removed from human experience. It is the glory that comes down the mountain and deals with the reality of life on the plain.

For many people this week has been a hard week, for victims of child sexual abuse and for Catholics and for all Christians as Pell's conviction has been made public.

A triumphalist church has been brought low. Many churches including the Anglican Church has had cases as well of child sexual abuse. I think this is a time to listen and care for victims, and lamenting what has happened. It is a time for a humbler church.

It has caused me to think about what sort of face we turn towards the world as Christians. What sort of face do we present as a church? As individuals? What do we show to others as we go about our daily lives?

When we turn a hard face to people, when we close our faces to people and choose to protect the institution of the church over the vulnerable; this is the opposite of what God means by glory and freedom.

God's real glory is not about power over, but power for, even power given over and let go of to bring freedom and release.

Jesus' changed face is about the divine shining in a human being fully alive, that through the vulnerability of flesh and giving up of life the demonic and the dark is overcome and released.

Transformation and change is a process that is often painful and slow.

Yet it is possible for our faces to change, to grow soften and shine with God's love.

This is God's call to us - to turn and listen to the Chosen One, to Jesus.

We can find new life and break open our closed faces that our lives may shine with divine love and grace.

It is possible to find new life and hope.

As we pivot from the glory of the mountaintop to the journey to the cross we are invited to listen anew to Jesus. This is really what Lent invites us to do.

The divine voice says to the disciples and to us 'this is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!'

Listen to Jesus to hear the stories and the words that can change our lives; that bring freedom and healing for all.

Jesus can be trusted. Listen to Jesus and let it touch your hearts and open your minds and transform your faces. Together we can shine with God's grace and love and through our words and actions.

In this era we are called to turn anew towards God and listen and pray and to know God's love.

There is a favourite prayer practise that Therese of Avila used to help experience Christ's love for you. You might find it helpful. It is very simple.

Imagine you see Jesus standing before you. He is looking at you... Notice him looking at you... Notice that he is looking at you, lovingly and humbly... Notice that he is looking at you lovingly...notice that he is looking at you humbly.

In the Name of our loving God. Amen.

Lections:
Exodus 34.29-35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3.12-4.2
Luke 9.28-36