

**Sermon St. James, Cambridge - 1 before Lent, 10 February 2013**  
**The Revd Jutta Brueck**

**Exodus 34.29-end**

**Ps. 99**

**2 Corinthians 3.4-end**

**Luke 9.28-36**

*( "This is my Son, the chosen. Listen to him.")*

I know many people who like going up a mountain – they enjoy the challenge of walking up, the reward of being able to see the surrounding area – the further, the better- ; the sense of freedom one can feel on top of a mountain and the way being up there clears the head.

I am one of them, and when I lived in Manchester for a couple of years, I was regularly heading to North Wales or the Lake District with friends who knew how to find their way around. I also have many memories of being on retreat, in North Wales or Scotland, and finding myself on the local hill or mountain day-in, day-out, especially when I was having a difficult time.

Living in Cambridge is a bit of a problem for people who like mountains, and I was struck in our Advent group this year, when we were thinking about 'living well", that every single member of the group said they liked walking on the Magog Down, especially when they needed to clear their head and think things through.

No co-incidence that in the Bible, both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, significant encounters with God happen on a mountain. In our first lesson this morning we have Moses going up the mountain to speak with God – for days on end. And Jesus, too, on numerous occasions seeks out a mountain to pray. It is the place where he finds solitude, but perhaps also the place where he is best able to listen to his Father; where is able to see most clearly.

So, it does not come as a surprise that the story of the Transfiguration takes place on a mountain. God's glory is being made manifest in Jesus. It's a moment when Christ's meaning is made visible, and we are shown that the road to glory is firmly connected with the cross.

The transfiguration takes place at the point of Jesus' ministry when he is beginning to talk with his disciples about who he is. In the verses before this morning's reading, he has asked them 'who do you say I am' and Peter's answer was 'The Messiah of God'. It is then that he starts to teach them about the Messiah having to suffer and die.

The transfiguration takes place about eight days after this conversation. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain with him. In Luke's version of the transfiguration Jesus is praying when his face changes and his clothes start to glow. At that point the three disciples are 'weighed down with sleep' – (we are reminded of the garden of Gethsemane when those three are also unable to stay awake) – but here, on the mountain, they manage to stay just awake enough to see Jesus as this shining figure, talking to Moses and Elijah. All this lasts only a moment - in his confusion Peter offers to build some booths – but immediately they are enveloped by a cloud and from the cloud comes the voice of God saying 'This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him.'(vs. 35)

Then, it's all over – there is Jesus alone. And all Luke tells us is 'And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

The transfiguration is pure gift – for Jesus, for the disciples, for us.

For Jesus, receiving the affirmation and approval of his Father as he sets his face towards Jerusalem, as he accepts that the road ahead will mean hostility, suffering, death, this encounter with his Father will have given him the courage, strength, trust to face what lies ahead. Yes, Jesus was the Son of God, but he walks that road as a human being.

For the disciples, seeing Jesus in his full glory must have been at once overwhelmingly awesome, as well as confusing and disturbing. What did it mean? They got a glimpse of Christ's radiance and splendour—and then it's gone. They go down the mountain to face the waiting crowds and to see the increasing hostility towards Jesus.

The way they behave in the run up to the crucifixion makes me think that they didn't grasp the full meaning of what they had seen until after the resurrection, and then they were slow to see. At this point they certainly did not understand that the path to glory leads through suffering and death.

It's only afterward that they are able to see everything in a new light: the light of the resurrection which is pre-figured in the transfiguration story.

Like Jesus and his disciples we experience moments that are like being on a mountain, an experience of God, a glimpse of God's presence, a moment of feeling loved and accepted. But like the disciples, we, too, need to learn to accept that the road to glory leads through death and resurrection. Although we are Easter people looking at the world in the light of the resurrection, it's easy to lose sight of God's presence in us and with us among the challenges of everyday living. Much of the time we walk the road, like Peter, John and James, not quite sure what exactly is going on, walking in faith, just about holding on to Jesus.

Just as the transfiguration took place at the point when Jesus turned his face to Jerusalem, we contemplate the story just before the start of Lent, when we are setting out on the road to the cross with him. The Lenten invitation to repent can be understood as an invitation to open our eyes to the presence of God in our lives and in the world. Repentance means – turning to God – seeing, allowing God to expand our vision, so God can work our transformation.

In the next few weeks we will be listening again to members of our congregation telling their faith stories. What they are doing in the preparation is to look at their lives to see the glory of God present in there. It's rewarding for us to listen, but perhaps even more rewarding to be doing the talk (once they've got over the nerves) rewarding to grow in awareness of how God is at work in one's life. Sometimes, it's only with hindsight that we can see. God's glory is there – in moments of quietness, in nature, in relationships, in music and others forms of art. But not just in moments of joy - people are usually shy to share the depth of this –they will have seen the glory of God most clearly in an experience of great anxiety, loss or pain. Reflecting on our lives in the light of God's presence - telling our faith stories is learning to see the transfiguration that takes place in our lives, all the time, anywhere. And as we learn to see, like Jesus and the disciples, we come away encouraged, strengthened, better able to walk the road until we enter into the fullness of God's glory. End with a prayer:

*Lord, catch me off guard this day (Lent), surprise me with some moment of beauty or pain, so that at least for the moment I am startled into seeing that you are here, in all your splendour, always and everywhere, barely hidden, beneath and beyond, within this life that I breathe.  
Amen.*