

## Sermon 5 March 2023 The Transfiguration

### Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain to converse with God. It is not certain just what mountain they ascended but it is thought it was probably Mt Hermon. Why did Jesus do this? What was his purpose?

Jesus knew his journey to the cross was looming. He had just come from Caesarea Philippi where he had told his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem where he would be killed and then would be raised three days later. We are told in Luke's version that he went there to pray. *'About eight days later Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountain to pray.'* Luke 9:28. So therein lies the nub of the matter. We know that Jesus communicated with God on a regular basis. He did this in order to draw strength from God for the challenges he had to deal with and also to elicit direction. Here he was, facing an enormous challenge, a terrifying challenge. He needed God's affirmation that this was indeed God's will.

There is a great lesson for us here. We need to regularly do the same thing. Am I doing your will, God? Give me guidance, direction, strength to do your will. Doing God's will is not always a walk in the park. It can be very challenging. We need to put ourselves on God's hands on a daily basis. Then, and only then, will we go some way towards fulfilling our duty and our commitment to being functional servants of his.

Jesus receives affirmation from God. *'From the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"'* Interestingly, this mirrors the affirmation Jesus received from God at his baptism. *'After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him."'* Matthew 3:16-17.

What is interesting is that took place as Jesus was facing a huge challenge – the beginning of his ministry. So here we have Jesus facing another massive challenge – his journey to the cross. And again, he looks to God for affirmation that he is doing his will. He looks to God for affirmation that God is with him as he embarks on this daunting journey.

Our challenges might not be quite as daunting as what Jesus was facing but we also need to reach out to God for that affirmation and that encouragement. A very simple daily prayer which I find helpful is, 'Lord, I am in your hands.'

In the context of today's Gospel, one of the challenges facing us on a daily basis is to be a light in the world of those who really do need a light shining in their world. Actually, that probably applies to every single one of us, if we think about it. But what does this mean? Let me try and explain by relating a story.

Some years ago, England's national television network, BBC-TV, sent its star journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge, to India to do a documentary on Mother Teresa. The BBC wanted to televise her and her sisters picking up the dying in the slums of Calcutta and taking them to a shelter run by the sisters. At the shelter the dying are washed and cared for, as Mother Teresa, puts it, 'within the sight of a loving face.'

The shelter is dimly lit by tiny windows high up on the walls. The television crew had not anticipated the poor lighting inside the building, and had not brought any portable lights with them. They concluded that it was useless to try and film the sisters working with the dying inside the building. But someone suggested they do it anyway. Perhaps some of the footage would be usable.

To everyone's surprise, the footage filmed inside the shelter turned out to be absolutely spectacular. The whole interior was bathed in a mysterious warm light. Technically speaking, the camera crew said, the results were impossible to explain.

Muggeridge has his own theory. He explains it in his book, 'Something Beautiful for God.' He writes, *'Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying is overflowing with love. One senses this immediately on entering. This love is luminous, like the halos artists have seen and made visible around the heads of saints. I find it not at all surprising that the luminosity should register on photographic film.'*

What Malcolm Muggeridge is talking about is not a figment of his imagination. It is something that is well documented in biblical and spiritual literature.

For example, the Book of Exodus says that when Moses came down from the mountain after talking with God, the people *'noticed how radiant the skin on his face had become, and they were afraid to come near him.'* Exodus 34:30.

When Stephen was being interrogated by the council, we read in Acts 6:15, *'At this point, everyone in the council stared at Stephen because his face became as bright as an angel's.'*

This brings us to today's gospel where Peter, James and John report that *'Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white.'* So what does this mean for us? I think we can look at it from two perspectives.

Firstly, Jesus undoubtedly acts as a light for us. A light leads, directs, shows the way, brightens, illuminates. Jesus said, *'I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness because you will have the light that leads to life.'* John 8:12. So there you have it! Not one of us is exempt from darkness in our lives. We all need direction. Put yourself in the Lord's hands and you will be going a long way towards achieving just that.

Secondly, Jesus also said, *'You are the light of the world...don't hide your light under a basket...let your good deeds shine out for all to see.'* Matthew 5:14-16. We are called and challenged to bring light into the lives of others. In other words, we are called and challenged to do what we can to bring relief, comfort, happiness, solace into the lives of those who need it, those who are distressed in any way. We are called to serve.

Lent is a time for asking ourselves how well we are living out our calling. Lent is a time for asking ourselves how well we are letting our light shine before others. And if we aren't doing as well as we could, Lent is a time for acknowledging that and doing something about it.

Amen.