

Bible Readings

1 Kings 19, v 1-9; Mark 9, 2-9;

Call to Worship

Today we give thanks that God is Lord of the Mountain and Lord of the Valley.

Hymn *Singing the Faith (STF) number 175*

Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore you
Hope of a life spent with you.

And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Chorus

*So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,
And you're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.*

So here I am to worship

King of all days
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
To the earth you created
All for love's sake become poor.

So here I am to worship

A Prayer of Adoration and Praise

With all creation we offer our praise and Adoration to God the giver of the light.
To Christ the Light of the World.
For the Scripture that illuminates our path. For the work of the Spirit enabling the Church world wide
To live and work for Gods praise and glory
Amen.

A Prayer of Confession

Forgive us Lord those times when we fail to recognise your glory.
Forgive us lord when we do see you in our brothers and sisters.
Forgive us when our words and actions do not point to you.
Forgive transform and renew us we pray by the power and love of Christ.
Amen.

SERMON

Life Changing Moments and glimpses of Glory.

Today is Valentine's Day and Transfiguration Sunday. Often when someone falls in love it is very apparent to their nearest and dearest. Individuals who have recently fallen in love will often have a radiance about them, a certain glow. Falling in love can certainly be described as a life changing moment.

Across the globe, touching the lives of all to varying degrees, the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic sadly, can also be classed as life changing.

Today, together, we revisit one of the Bible's many life changing moments, the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Jesus and three of the disciples Peter, James and John climb Mount Tabor and here the disciples witness a stunning life changing glimpse of the Glory of God. For a brief moment, Jesus is seen radiant before them and joined by Moses and Elijah, two of the great lights of Hebrew Scripture.

In the Old Testament, one encounter with God and Elijah comes when Elijah is at his lowest, in fear of his very life, on the run from Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah asks that he might die. Moments of glory and glimpses of God, thankfully do not only come when we are emotionally high. For many months now we have been on the run ourselves, not from Queen Jezebel but from another force of evil, a pandemic. Where have we seen glimpses of God's glory in these days? I am sure your answers would be many and varied, well worth making your own personal list.

Remember how The East Anglia District of the Methodist Church, during the dark days of January encouraged us to offer January light. Working in tissue paper, the Rev Jo Jacobs put up a wonderful stained glass window effect picture in the doorway and street facing windows of Seaton Road Methodist Church. Others soon followed suit and many up-lifting glimpses of glory were posted on our various websites. Some people committed to walking past the various contributions of art work for their daily exercise in order that their spirits might be up lifted; in order that in the darkest of days we might catch a glimpse of glory. A sharing of positivity with local communities was evoked and encouraged greatly by January light; long may it continue.

One of the vital lessons that the disciples learnt and we need to learn from the Transfiguration of Jesus is that the power of God's love shines on, even in the darkest night. I loved Jo's pictures because it depicted a lighthouse the adopted symbol for January light. Jesus is like a lighthouse, right there a living presence in the rockiest times of our life; He is radiant.

In the Matthew and Luke version of the story of Transfiguration, Jesus' glory is also displayed in the valley with the healing of the young boy who may have had epilepsy.

Moments of transfiguration are not just for the high moments of our lives, we can meet Jesus profoundly in the darkest of our days, like Elijah did when on the run. After all it is only on the darkest and clearest of winter nights that we see the wonder of the stars in all their glory. If it is a clear night tonight, it will be well worth stepping outside for a few moments and drinking in the majesty of the heavens, for this too is transfiguration, made possible by the darkness.

When Jesus comes down from the mountain, he sets his face resolutely towards Jerusalem. After this mountain high comes the path of suffering for Christ, all the way to the Cross, where the full weight of sin is carried by Jesus. I find it so helpful that the writer of John's gospel has a different angle on transfiguration, he sees it not on Mount Tabor, but would have us look upon the cross as the supreme moment of transfiguration in the life of Christ. Our concept of glimpses of glory in life changing moments is broadened by a more pragmatic view of Scripture. For in the Gospels, Transfiguration is not a solitary event, it is not just about what happened on Mount Tabor when Jesus gathered Peter, James and John closely to his side. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus transfigured many people, the wounded, the broken and the lost. He called to the deepest part of people and transfigured them by the power of God's love.

During the pandemic we are seeing signs of transfiguration and glimpses of glory, all around us; in Sacrifice, in service, in helping each other with words of kindness and care. It has become apparent that what we thought might only last a couple of months has dragged on; we were prepared for a sprint but maybe not for a marathon. People are feeling very fatigued; everyone's mental, spiritual and physical health is affected in some way.

We easily apply glimpses of glory to the high moments of our lives, it is far more challenging to unearth them when we feel, perhaps for the most parts these days, that we are called to live in the valley.

I love the writer John Swinton who is a theologian university lecturer and former Psychiatric nurse. He was recently interviewed on the St. Pauls Cathedral website by Paul Gooder. Well worth getting the link. If you are experiencing Corona fatigue and feeling low, he gives some useful tips.

Here is just one.

As Christians it is important to know what is going on in the world but one news free day a week may actually be beneficial. When people are really struggling, endless facts and figures, endless information can be a bridge too far. Think how Jesus would sometimes remove himself from the crowds. Intentional removal for a time, losing yourself in a good book or a TV box set is, I think, to be encouraged. Encouraged that we might be in this together for the long haul. The mountain top experiences will I come again. But let's be kind to each other in the valley.

Jesus is Lord of the mountain top experience, those days when you feel exuberant, full of life and oozing faith. Jesus is also Lord of the Valley when you feel shaky, vulnerable and fed up to the teeth with the weight of it all. In order to really embrace the full concept of transfiguration we need to acknowledge that. Moments of transfiguration are not just reserved for the mountain. The living presence of Christ is with us at all times.

It is ok, if you don't always feel that presence; you are human. On the cross Jesus knew the depth of perceived abandonment. The Church has a calling to be alongside those who are struggling most, Worship at its best will offer the praise of the mountain but also the lament of the valley. If we don't address lament & valley living, we exclude those in greatest need and fail to speak a language that is comprehensive. The psalmists know this well, with around 40% of all psalms containing some form of lamentation.

Many of our hymns only address the light of Christ on the mountain and they are wonderful and uplifting and long may we sing them and draw from them, but perhaps just now we are better served by those hymns that acknowledge the living presence of Christ in the valley, as well as on the mountain, for this too is Transfiguration.

"Christ whose Glory fills the skies" written by John Wesley is one such hymn. Yes, it scales the heights of glory but it is not afraid to name the human condition and that can be in the valley, the human condition may suffer deep depression.

In this hymn, Wesley, with wonderful sublime ageless insight offers us the line; "Joyless is the days return till they mercies beams I see, till they inward light impart, glad my eyes and warm my heart."

This hymn has long been spiritual medicine for those in the valley. Let us drink deeply from its words.

Amen

Hymn *STF number 134*

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o'er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star in my heat appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return

Till they mercy's beams I see,
Till they inward light impart,
Glad my eyes and warmth my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, radiance divine;
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more they self-display,
Shining to the perfect day.

Prayers for Others.

For all those who find themselves living in the valley today.

The valley of grief and loss.

The valley of broken relationships.

The valley of wrong choices and bad decisions.

The valley of hunger and want.

The valley of inadequate health care.

The valley of violence and warfare.

The valley of natural disaster.

Great God, Lord of all May you be found in the valley.

May your living presence be felt and known.

Equip us as individuals and as the body of Christ to reach out

To neighbours near and far in their need.

And when in need ourselves make us open to your presence in others.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer**Hymn** *STF number 293*

All heaven declares

The glory of the risen Lord;

Who can compare

With the beauty of the lord?

For ever he will be

The Lamb upon the throne;

I gladly bow the knee

And worship him alone.

I will proclaim

The glory of the risen Lord,

Who once was slain

To reconcile us to God

For ever you will be

The Lamb upon the throne;

I gladly bow the knee,

And Worship you alone.

The Grace & Blessing

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be among you all, now and forever more.

The Blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and ever more.

Amen.