

Sunday 23rd February 2020		Transfiguration of our Lord	
Grahamstown Cathedral		Sunday before Lent	
7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Year A	
Ex 24:12-18	Ps 2	2 Peter 1:16-21	
		Matthew 17:1-9	
WHERE DO I FIND HOPE?			

We remember with great sadness Tazne van Wyk, an 8-year-old Cape Town girl whose murdered body was found in a drain outside Worcester, this past week.

“And Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light.” (Matt 17:2)

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Today is the Sunday of the Transfiguration, the Sunday next before Lent (also known as Quinquagesima, SAPB pg 87¹). Our Gospel reading sets the scene. It is a wonderful story to use with Lectio Divina, the journey in our prayer and imagination as we journey up the mountain with Jesus, into the presence of the Father.

There, on the mountain, we are surrounded by the cloud of God’s glory. We see Jesus transfigured, his clothes and face shining with light. We see and hear Moses and Elijah, the great Old Testament figures representing the Law and the Prophets. We hear the voice of the Father, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to

¹ The title originates from the Latin word for 50th, and is a reference to the fifty days before Easter, including Sundays.

him!” Like the disciples, we are overcome with fear. Jesus touches us; we stand up and look around, and everything seems to be back to normal.

But we have encountered glory, we have heard the voice of God, and so nothing will ever be the same again (as St Peter later writes, 2 Peter 1:16-18). We *know* that we have walked and talked with God, in mystery and wonder and adoration and fear. And we carry this event and this experience in our hearts, not to boast about it, but to draw strength and courage from what God has given us.

The Transfiguration of our Lord is a foretaste of the resurrection. “It is one of a series of supernatural manifestations by which God the Father authenticated Jesus as his Son.”² We are given a glimpse of Jesus in glory. God reveals His Son to us as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God. The Law and the Prophets, represented by Moses and Elijah – the key figures in the Old Testament – all point to Jesus.

Transfiguration is a big word. It points to what we long for, what we hope for, what we shall become; it’s the mountain top experience, when we see things more clearly; it gives us a break from the struggle and brokenness of everyday life. We long for transfiguration – for profound change in our hearts; to find that place and space of peace where we are united with God; when we are in God’s presence. But we also long for transformation – for profound change of our own failures, broken relationships; and our society.

² *Saints and Seasons*, p 91

Violent deaths; the murder of Tazne van Wyk and others like her; rape; poor governance, corruption, mismanagement – SAA, ESKOM; the appalling behaviour by the EFF at the SONA last week; FW de Klerk’s astonishing statement about apartheid: how we long for transformation: for our broken world to be healed and made whole. In a country that is losing hope, do we find hope?

THE BIG QUESTION: WHERE DO I FIND HOPE?

The Transfiguration provides the context for our final sermon in the “Big Questions” sermon series. We began with “Is there a God? – where do I find light?” Last week we tackled “Where do I find love?” Today, our big question is “Where do I find hope?”

What do we mean by hope?

Some definitions: hope is “longing, a desire for something to happen.” We hope that it will rain tomorrow. We hope that we shall pass the exam. Hope is powerful. We hope for better times; for a happier year; for circumstances to change. Hope can inspire us, and help us to keep going even in the most overwhelming of circumstances.

Christian hope is something more. Christian Hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised. Our hope is in the faithfulness, the nature of God.

The Sunday of the Transfiguration is all about mountaintop experiences. Wonder and light and glory and revelation. It

is easy to speak of glory and wonder, when all is light and joy. But where do we find hope when our world is dark? When we are overwhelmed? When we wake up to a day of darkness and despair? When the news terrifies us? When we don't have work? As our national discourse seems to get more and more toxic and destructive? When our democracy seems to be under threat, with violence and intimidation becoming the tactics of protest politics, in parliament and on our campuses, when anger and resentment govern relationships on social media and society...where do we find hope?

It is no wonder that stress, anxiety and depression are frighteningly common these days. It is all too common to hear from students (e.g. Rhodes Confessions Facebook page) just how tough they are finding things, whether it is academic pressure and adjusting to tertiary, or relationship issues, or financial worries, or family matters back home. Even this early in the academic year, some are feeling overwhelmed to the point where they want to end it all. And especially for first year students, away from home for the first time, transitioning from matric to university, things can be overwhelming.

Nor do we find it easy to talk about our inner despair or darkness. We think that we ought to be coping. Or we think that "if God loves us, if we are faithful, then all should be wonderful." But it doesn't work that way. We all face our own inner darkness, or we encounter suffering and evil. For many people, "darkness is my only companion" (Psalm 88:19). There is no easy or quick-fix answer.

FINDING HOPE

In times and seasons of greatest darkness, God is present. Our hope is in Him.

We return again and again to the place of trust and peace.

Part of the way forward is to journey deeper into the love and grace of God, to climb the mountain of transfiguration, to discover and rediscover God's grace and strength even in the most terrible of circumstances. We enter into this sacred space of the Cathedral and climb the mount of transfiguration. As we worship, we are on the mountaintop; we meet with the transfigured Christ in Word and Sacrament.

And we draw on the prayers and experiences of others, in the psalms.

The psalms are the prayer book of Israel and of the church. They reflect both darkness and light, the whole range of experience, from despair to hope. (Which is why it is so good to pray our way through the psalms).

Psalm 77

"I call to my God... in the day of my distress I seek the Lord, I stretch out my hands to him by night: my soul is poured out without ceasing, it refuses all comfort. I think upon God and groan aloud...my spirit faints...At night I am grieved to the heart: I ponder and my spirit makes search...Will the Lord cast us off forever: will he show us

his favour no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever: and his promise come to an end for all generations? Has God forgotten to be gracious...?” (Ps 77:1-9)

The good times have gone. God has forgotten. God is silent. The bad times are upon us. Despair. Waiting on God, wondering, hanging on by my fingernails... about to let go and give up...

But then the psalm changes – v 11ff

“I will declare the mighty acts of the Lord: I will call to mind your wonders of old. I will think on all that you have done: and meditate on your works...”

What has happened?

The psalmist remembers what God has done; and remembers the nature and the faithfulness of God:

“You are the God that works wonders: you made known your power among the nations. By your mighty arm you redeemed your people: the children of Israel and Joseph... You led your people like sheep: by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps 77:14-20)

We turn again and again to the faithfulness of God; we climb the mount of transfiguration; we seek his presence in the midst of darkness and despair; we trust in his daily provision, our daily bread; we return to the assurance that “all things work together for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28); that “nothing

can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:39). We return from the mountain top with courage and hope filling our hearts. And we go as people of hope to bring hope into our broken and hurting world.

CONCLUSION

Let us find our hope in Christ: in the love of God for us; in the purposes of God for us; in the provision of God for us.

Julian of Norwich was a 13th-14th century English mystic. She wrote:

“ALL SHALL BE WELL,
AND ALL SHALL BE WELL,
AND ALL MANNER OF THINGS SHALL BE
WELL...
FOR THERE IS A FORCE OF LOVE MOVING
THROUGH THE UNIVERSE
THAT HOLDS US FAST AND WILL NEVER LET
US GO.”

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Dean of Grahamstown
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