

Prepare for this journey of transfiguration

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Transfiguration – last Sunday after Epiphany – Ex 34 29-35, Ps 99, 2 Cor 3 12-42, Lk 9 28-36

Readers of Harry Potter books will know that transfiguration means change. At one point, the students had to change a teacup into a tortoise. But they were told marks would be deducted if the tortoise's shell still had a willow pattern on it. And what if a person is transfigured? Many stories explore this idea, like R.L. Stevenson's story of the good Dr Jekyll and the evil Mr Hyde. He raises the question of how these opposite aspects of a person's nature might achieve integrity in ways that are true to themselves and safe for the community they live in.

Today, integrity and honesty seem completely up for grabs among world leaders. So the story of our leader, Jesus and his transfiguration is important to ponder. St Luke presents the story of the transfiguration in a rich and challenging way? What's Luke trying to get across to us? And as followers and imitators of Christ, what are we to do about it? *Who is the real Jesus that we seek to follow and imitate?*

This is a very densely packed part of Luke's portrait of Jesus. Just a few paragraphs after today's account of the Transfiguration, we come to the pivotal turning point in this Gospel. Jesus sets his course towards Jerusalem; towards inevitable betrayal, suffering, rejection, death and resurrection. And over the coming months of Lent, we hear the call to turn with Jesus and walk this same journey.

Today's gathering here is our last celebration of the Epiphany light which reveals Christ as 'the hope of all who thirst for

righteousness and peace'. But in just three days, on Ash Wednesday, the ashes of our hope will be marked on our foreheads.

Luke's account of Christ's transfiguration comes just seven verses after Peter's famous declaration that Jesus is the Messiah of God – the anointed one, promised down through the centuries. So if they already know his true identity, what's the need for today's special revelation of Jesus' divine nature to Peter, John and James?

The answer is in those seven intervening verses. There, we hear Jesus spell out the true cost of discipleship to him. Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow him. If you want to save your life, you lose it. What does it profit you to gain the whole world but lose your very selves? Those who are ashamed to own Jesus and his teachings must know that he'll be ashamed of them when he comes again in glory.

So Peter's declaration of Jesus' true identity – as true as it may have been – in the end, he's not there yet. His faith is still not enough to survive the rigours of even a routine life, far less one where you have to carry your own cross each day. We'll be reminded of that in Holy Week.

And of course, we need to remember that Luke was writing for people who knew all about being persecuted.

On top of all these contexts, the account of the transfiguration itself is loaded with connections too. It's literally at a high point, being on a mountain – like Moses was when he received the Law on Mt Sinai. And it's also a glimpse into a reality that is usually only seen by faith and not by sight – Jesus physically revealed as he truly is, the beloved Son of God, the Chosen One, the One to whom the Law and the Prophets point. So there with him are Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, the prophets. And as our other readings have reminded us, Jesus' own transfigured

appearance recalls Moses' shining face after each time he appeared before the Lord.

So today we see Jesus, transfigured, radiant, glorious, and talking with Moses and Elijah, both also appearing in glory. He's talking with these ancient ones about his departure – his exodus. And now we know that his departure is the way of the Cross. But Peter, James and John don't know it yet. So we see Peter's bumbling reaction – trying to freeze the moment in boxes – a bit like us trying to freeze important moments with our phone cameras. But thankfully the cloud comes – in the Exodus story, a sign of God's presence in the daytime. The cloud comes, and from it, God's voice declares, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'

The voice tells them – and tells us – to perceive the significance of Jesus – not just when he looks white and shiny, but just as much when he's dusty and disheveled. And in perceiving the significance of Jesus, we are to give him our attention, to listen to him. Listen to him. We are the ones called to be transfigured. When we give our full attention to Jesus, we *are* transfigured. As we heard Paul put it in 2 Cor 3:18, *all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

That's what it has to do with us. We are to be transfigured – to mirror God's love and joy and peace and beauty. What Jesus showed his disciples was something he intended would happen to them too – to *us* too. We need it and the world needs it too. It's how we'll find out who we really are and become a community formed for what we're truly called to do and to be. But change is anything but comfortable.

We're called to risk it today: to prepare for this journey of transfiguration. In all the messiness of life, of discipleship, when we listen deeply to Jesus we will see

ourselves and our community being shaped by God's grace to become what God knows we can be, like it or not. Thanks be to God! Amen