

The feast of Jesus' Transfiguration

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Transfiguration– Mt 17 1-9 Bushfires and Transfiguration – Nature teaches resurrection life

Often when we celebrate the feast of Jesus' Transfiguration on this last Sunday after the Epiphany, parts of this Land are reeling from terrible bushfires. For me, that's ironic. I choose the last Sunday after Epiphany to celebrate Transfiguration instead of its official day, August 6th, because it's so confronting then. August 6th was the day in 1945 when the atomic bomb was first used in war.

So whichever way I go, it seems I can't avoid jarring contrast. I dodge the contrast between the Transfigured Jesus's blazing, living light and the deadly flash of the atomic bomb. But today, we're praying again that life is protected from the deadly flames of bushfires that have brought such destruction to Victoria, and continue to do so around Deep Creek today. So is there something to say about the coincidence of deadly bushfires and Jesus's Transfiguration – the living, breathing light his friends saw radiate from Jesus that day on the mountain? Let's see.

✘ I'm showing you a photo of something called an epicormic bud. It's a bud that bursts out of the charred bark of gum trees soon after a bushfire. One day, nothing is green. As far as the eye can see, there's just a forest of charcoal sticks with ash for undergrowth – a desolation. But then almost overnight, gum trees erupt with patches of green – the colour of life. They develop into shoots that grow amazingly quickly. The desolation is transfigured. The charred bark had concealed the life it protected; life that kept flowing, invisible to

us, beneath its surface.

I see nature teaching us about what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration all those years ago. Life we can't see suddenly reveals its presence; determined to break out; to transfigure death; to renew Creation. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote about this. ^{Rom 1.20} *Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.* And Paul had never seen a gum tree! So with epicormic buds in our hearts, let's see what we can make of the astonishing revelation that was the Transfiguration of our Lord.

This time, the revelation wasn't green; it was pure, brilliant light. Every time an icon is written / painted in the Orthodox tradition the artist begins with a wash of a golden colour. It's called uncreated light. It recalls the first day of creation when God said *'be light', and light was.* That light was the light of God's very being. That's why the Orthodox call it uncreated light. Our loving God is light. And that was the light we just saw Jesus reveal to Peter, James and John. Their teacher Jesus was that light – he is that light. It was a vision for them, and it's a vision for us; a vision of who Jesus truly is.

So what's Matthew the evangelist wanting to say to us by putting this story where it is in the Gospel?

Shortly before the Transfiguration happened in the Gospel, Peter had said to Jesus, *You are the Messiah.* But then Jesus talked about the way he was to suffer and die. Peter tried to put Jesus back in the 'Messiah box'. Jesus rebuked him and explained that it's all about servanthood not control. But how to get that across? Jesus told them, *Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who won't taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.*^{16.28} Today, for

Peter, James and John, that's just what we saw happen. Jesus took them up a mountain and his inner glory blazed out. Moses and Elijah appeared with him. So the disciples actually saw the Kingdom of God, *come with power*; come in the person of their teacher, Jesus. But now Peter tries to put all three of them in tiny houses. Boxes again. His motives are good. That's what Jewish people have always learnt to do with sacred things; put them in a safe place where nothing can defile them.

Peter hasn't understood the idea that the Messiah can die, far less rise again. So Jesus orders them all to keep quiet about this vision until after he's risen from the dead; don't tell the story until you can tell it all. You can't explain who I am until you know the whole story. And they wander off, wondering what it can mean; this rising from the dead business. Yet there was this memory of an incredible vision that they'd never forget. A vision of life beyond; something more that they're not ready to understand yet. We're in a similar spot to the disciples, aren't we. Every now and then, we can have visions of Jesus – who he really is. But like his first disciples we're on the journey with him. For them, his rising from the dead was the mystery. For us, it's his coming again and our being raised from the dead.

We live with mystery, but in the meantime, what does the transfiguration have to say to us? Jesus' transfiguration reveals who he really is. As I started thinking about this sermon, I thought about the experience we can have of suddenly realising there's more to a person than we ever knew. And sometimes people can see that there's more to you or me than we know ourselves. Sometimes other people are given the gift of telling us who we really are. Or we can do it for them.

I remember as a new Christian I'd done something stupid, said hurtful things, and I felt ashamed. When my priest asked me to do some tasks in the church, I said I didn't think I should.

Because of what I'd done, I wasn't a good enough person. He didn't agree. He said those hurtful actions and nasty words weren't who I really was. That deep down, there was a more real me; one who could see those actions and words for what they were; one wanted to do better; to leave those old ways behind. In a way he held up a mirror to me. He held it on an angle to reveal what I couldn't see. I pray that this is our gift to each other, and to our community. That we hold up a kind, heartening mirror that reveals a person's inner life: that we reflect Jesus's transfigured light as those called to be the light of the world. Amen