

Transfiguration – Another Beginning

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Pentecost + 11B – Transfiguration – 2 Sam 11. 26–12 .13a;
Mark 9. 2-10

Last week I said a few words to introduce the shocking story we heard about King David's adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his loyal soldier, Uriah the Hittite. We heard some of the story last week; about a king who stays home from battle and lets his troops face the danger without him, his adultery, the pregnancy, the failed cover up, and then the plot to arrange Uriah's death. I said it was a shocking story – that the scriptures don't gild the lily; that they show what dreadful things people get up to. But then they also show us how God deals with wrongs like this.

Today we hear how God responds. The story's moved on. David's plot to have Uriah murdered has succeeded, and after Bathsheba's time of mourning is over, she becomes David's newest wife. All good? Will David get off scot free? No way. Now God's response. 'The thing that David had done displeased the Lord, ^{12.1} and the Lord sent Nathan to David.' When a prophet comes to speak to you, watch out!

Nathan tells David a parable which exposes David in two ways. It exposes how vile his shabby, selfish and cowardly behaviour was. And it also reveals David's very clear sense of what's right and wrong. *David's anger was greatly kindled ... He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die ...'* And because David can tell right from wrong, it means there's hope. Shocking wrong has been done, but God's way of dealing with it means there *is* hope.

Now Nathan accuses David to his face. He recounts all the blessings God has showered on David, and what punishment might even up this betrayal of trust. Our study group thought the threatened punishment unfairly targeted David's family rather than him directly. But hyperbole has its place and the desired response was spoken; *David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'* God's priority of the poor and vulnerable over the rich and powerful has been made crystal clear.

Our cycle of readings won't finish this story next week; we'll have to read it at home. But today, we are given Psalm 51. Many Psalms have a superscription in the Hebrew which says who it's written for, who wrote it, and sometimes when it relates to a particular event. Psalm 51's superscription says, *'To the choir leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.'* Psalm 51 is David's penitential Psalm on this time in his life. It's also a testimony to his hope in God's steadfast love; his hope that we can trust God to renew us – to create in us a clean heart – even if we've behaved as badly as David did.

I remember as a new Christian I'd done something hurtful and said some very unkind things. I felt ashamed about this for a long time. When my priest asked me to help in the church, I said I didn't think I should, because I wasn't a good enough person. He didn't agree. He said those hurtful actions and words weren't who I really was; that deep down, there was a more real me; the one who could see those actions and words for what they were; the one who wanted to do better; to leave those old ways behind. He could see better things in me than I could see in myself.

Jesus' transfiguration does the same thing. It's the beginning of another stage in his disciples' transfiguration. Jesus was revealed to be much more than they could ever have imagined. The Lord of time – present with his friends, and at the same time, present with people from the olden days – Elijah and Moses. The Lord of light – light emanating from him rather than

simply shining on him. The transfiguration reveals who Jesus really is. His friends wouldn't get it until later; not until they saw what he would do for them and for all of us in his crucifixion and resurrection.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Why would he say that? It's like us at a funeral; we can have the experience of suddenly realising there's much more to a person than we ever knew when we hear what people tell us about them at their funeral. All at once, we see what they'd really done with the life they were given. It's a revelation, isn't it. Jesus showed he knew this same limitation in his disciples on the way down the mountain of Transfiguration. They wouldn't get it until they'd seen him on the Cross, and then seen him rise again. But their experience of his transfiguration opened them to the true meaning of the cross.

What does all this mean for us? We are people called to live lives that emulate the example of Jesus. And despite what we might think of ourselves, we are to trust that Jesus sees something much greater in each of us than we dare to imagine; in fact he infuses it into us by the Spirit. We get a taste of this when people can see that there's more to you or me than we believe of ourselves. Sometimes other people are given the gift of telling us who we really are. Or we can do it for them.

All those years ago, that priest held a mirror up to me; held it on an angle I hadn't imagined before. And nothing has been the same since. I pray that this might be our gift to each other, and to our community; that we are compassionate, encouraging mirrors who reveal people's inner lives; that we reveal the hope God offers – death overcome by life. Let the Transfigured Christ, his light and love, his belief in us, shape us as instruments of his Transfiguration, showing all who we can be. Amen.