

Sermon

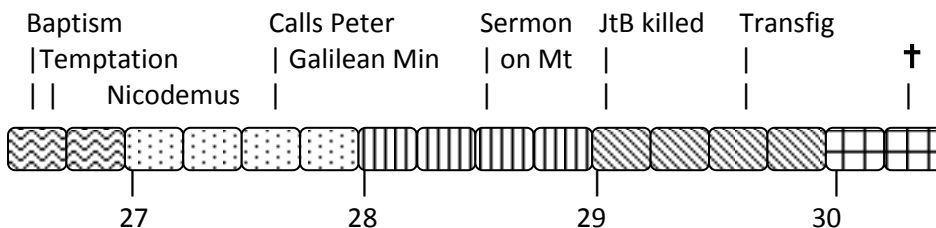
Glorified

Matthew 17:1-9

16th March 2014

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Timescale of the Jesus' ministry: I think it is easy to get muddled with the order of events in Jesus' ministry because of the way we refer to them in church. We map the events of three years onto a single church year. We have just heard the account of the transfiguration. We are not saying that the transfiguration occurred during the 40 days in the wilderness. No, but it is just useful for us to think about it as an encouragement at this stage. Here is an estimated timeline of Jesus' ministry.



The Transfiguration

When Peter made his declaration of who Jesus was: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"¹ Jesus responded by telling them of the coming crucifixion and that his followers must bear their cross daily. A week later he took his inner group of disciples up the mountain where these events occurred.

Why read about the Transfiguration now in Lent? It is placed here in the Lectionary as an encouragement as we use Lent as a time of spiritual discipline. At the heart of the old collect for this time it said,

"...Grant that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory..."

It is set before us as an encouragement to bear our cross because of the glory of Jesus who said we need to carry our cross daily. It is set before us as an encouragement that God will continue the process of sanctification by which he changes us to be more like his Son. It is an encouragement to remember that we will be made like him.

Peter had realized (by revelation) that Jesus was the Messiah. But the transfiguration made it clear that Jesus was not just a man appointed to role, but that he was and is God.

¹ Matthew 16:16

Moses is obviously associated with the Law of God since he was one who received it and gave it to the people of Israel. Elijah is regarded as the chief of the prophets. Their presence sums up all the revelation of God at that time (the Law and the Prophets) and their revelation points to Jesus and is fulfilled by him even as he said in the Sermon on the Mount. This man is not your run-of-the-mill prophet. The disciples would know that something immense was happening even without the visible glory of God.

Jesus' Glory

Jesus was transfigured by God. It is not something he did for himself. He is seen with divine glory - his own glory which he laid aside for the incarnation. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as light. This is not "Persil washes whiter" or "Cleans like a white tornado." The description is of light blazing from his face and shining from his clothes.

When John wrote the account of his vision on Patmos (The Book of Revelation) he described the glorified Jesus appearing to him:

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. ²

Jesus' glory was normally displayed through his character during his time on earth. But on this occasion, it is seen visibly as radiance.

The Father's Glory

When God the Father spoke, a cloud enveloped them. But this is not a normal cloud. It is bright or radiant. The word can mean composed of light. It is a cloud of light. That manifestation of God's presence was not uncommon in the Old Testament.

Think of the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites through the wilderness³. It was a pillar or column of fire and cloud. It gave light by night and shade by day. It was described as the angel of the Lord accompanying them. When Moses met with God on Mt Sinai a cloud came down over the mountain. When the Tabernacle was completed, "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." ⁴

In the same way, the glory of God appeared as a shining cloud, called the Shekinah at the opening of Solomon's temple.⁵ In fact, God making his presence known in a radiant cloud was well known to Jews. So here, the Father speaks from the radiant cloud and identifies Jesus: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

We are to be changed

This word, "transfigure" used of the change in Jesus' appearance is *metamorphoo* in Greek – from which we get metamorphosis. We use that word for the astonishing transformation that occurs when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Paul twice uses the same word about the transformation believers experience as a result of regeneration.

Romans 12 - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. ⁶

² Revelation 1:16-18

³ Ex 14:24

⁴ Exodus 40:34-35

⁵ 1 Kings 8:10

⁶ Romans 12:1-2

Interestingly, when Moses had been in God's presence on Mt Sinai, he came down again with his face shining. Because with time, this reflected glory faded he veiled his face, so the people would not see the fading of the radiance. That is what Paul is referring to the other time he uses the word *metamorphoo*:

- But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.⁷

He contrasts our experience with Moses'. He says we grow in our reflecting of the glory of Jesus as we are transfigured into his likeness with ever increasing glory – from glory to glory.

With all this talk of glory and light, another verse caught my attention: Matthew 13:43 "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." I had always thought of that "shining" as a metaphor for righteousness, but in this context, it makes me wonder whether Jesus was describing our appearance in the resurrection.

For, you see, Paul also says that in the resurrection we will be like Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15 he writes about earthly and spiritual existences and the glory of our future resurrection bodies. He says,

Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.⁸

Barbara's Memorial

The end window in the Chapel is a memorial to Barbara Thatcher. You will remember that Barbara often spoke of the glory of God. That window attempts to represent what Stephen saw when he "... looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."⁹

Funnily enough, I have only one of Barbara's sermon to hand and it is on the Transfiguration. Let me quote some portions from it:

Mystery surrounds what happened, but it seems that Jesus was engulfed in God's glory. His whole being became radiant.

The disciples woke to see this. The air must have been vibrating with the power. Not only was Jesus shining, his robes brilliant white but he was talking to Moses and Elijah.

And then the cloud came down. All through scripture, a cloud had signified God's presence. The pillar of cloud had led the Israelites through the desert. A cloud had filled the tabernacle of Solomon's temple when the ark containing the tablets of the law was placed in the Holy of Holies. Ezekiel saw the glory of God as a cloud filling the temple.

Out of the cloud, God spoke to Peter, James and John. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."¹⁰ In other words believe all that he is telling you. What he has told you is true – follow on to the cross and beyond.

And suddenly all was returned to normal: Moses and Elijah were gone. The cloud was gone. Jesus was once more Jesus, the man they knew.

They however were changed. They had seen his glory. They had heard the voice of God.

She closed with these words:

⁷ 2 Cor 3

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:47-49 (New Living Translation)

⁹ Acts 7:55-56

¹⁰ Mark 9:7

What then is the message for us from this reading? Yes, it is a mystery. But we are to hear, as the disciples heard, the voice of God speaking to us.

Listen to Jesus – follow him to the cross – give up our lives to him so that he may give his life to us. His greatest gift – the authority of his name. Only as we take that to ourselves can we be Christ to the world.

Barbara continued:

Mother Teresa shone with the light and love of Christ – this is her prayer:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your Spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come into contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus.

Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as you shine; so to shine as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, shall be all from you, none of it will be ours: it will be you, shining on others through us. Let us thus praise you in the way you love best by shining on those around us. Amen.