



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

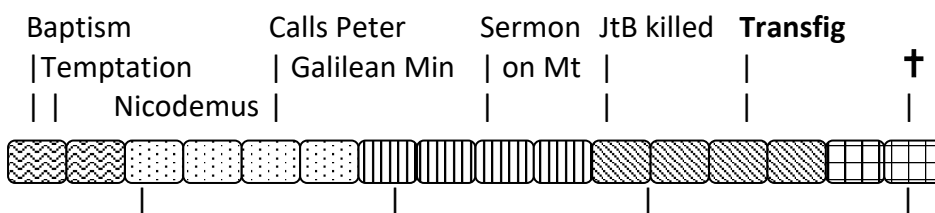
Changed from Glory into Glory

Luke 9:28-36; Philippians 3:17–4:1

13th March 2022

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It is easy to get muddled with the order of events in Jesus' ministry because of the way we tell them in the church calendar. The events of three years are overlaid onto a single church year. We have just heard the account of the transfiguration. Here is an approximate timeline of Jesus' ministry:



There is no suggestion that the transfiguration occurred during the 40 days in the wilderness, so why read about the Transfiguration now in Lent? Well, Lent isn't about following Jesus through his wilderness testing, it is a preparation for Good Friday and Easter. The Transfiguration is placed here in the Lectionary as an encouragement as we use Lent as a time of spiritual discipline. At the heart of the traditional collect for this Sunday were the words:

“...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.

The Transfiguration

Just a week before this event, Peter had understood (by revelation) that Jesus was the Messiah. He made his declaration that Jesus was “the Christ of God.”¹ Jesus had responded by telling them of the coming crucifixion

¹ Luke 9:20

and that his followers must bear their cross daily. Then a week later he took his inner group of disciples up the mountain where these events occurred.

The transfiguration made it clear that Jesus was not just a man appointed to a role, but that he was and is God. He shone with divine glory; there was the confirming witness of the audible voice of God, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." His disciples then and his disciples now are to listen to him.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in glorious splendour. This is pretty startling too since they had been dead for 1430 & 880 years respectively! What should we make of that?

Firstly, why Moses and Elijah? The usual answer is that they represent the Law and the Prophets, but it is not clear why Elijah would be chosen rather than say Isaiah. Moses had a mountaintop experience meeting God on Sinai when his face shone with glory. He was the lawgiver and a great prophet. Elijah had the ministry of calling Israel back to loyalty to Yahweh when they had gone after Baal and Malachi prophesied long after his death that God would yet use him:

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb [i.e. Sinai] for all Israel. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes."²

Perhaps we can say Moses represents the past with the Exodus and the Law, while Elijah points to the future as a precursor of the Messiah. The other interesting thing is that both of them had strange departures from earth. Moses died and was buried by the Lord. Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind.

Secondly, in the light of the recent series on the resurrection, here is an example of what Jesus meant when he said, "[God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."³ These departed men of God are alive to God and it is from that living reality that they could be brought to meet with Jesus.

Thirdly, do you note what Luke records they were discussing with Jesus? Only Luke tells us this detail. They were discussing his departure from Jerusalem. Remember that Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt in the Exodus. And Jesus is the fulfilment of the Passover lamb. The Greek for departure is exodus. Here the true Passover lamb was discussing his departure from Jerusalem which would be by way of the cross.

Divine Glory

Jesus was transfigured. He was seen with his own glory which he laid aside for the incarnation. The appearance of his face changed (Matthew says it shone like the sun) and his clothes became dazzling white. This is not "Persil washes whiter" or "Cleans like a white tornado." Luke records that his clothes shone like lightning.

When God the Father spoke, it was out of a cloud which enveloped them.

The cloud is a significant sign. It doesn't seem so to us who live in the land of the long white cloud; clouds are normal to us. But in Israel rain comes in set seasons; most of the year the sky is clear. But through the Old Testament, clouds often attend appearances of God. Think about that: the Angel of the Lord accompanied the Hebrews through the wilderness in the fiery cloudy pillar; on Mt Sinai God spoke to Moses out of fire and cloud; there was the cloud over the Tent of Meeting when Moses met with God; God appeared in the Most Holy Place in a cloud over the mercy seat; the Lord came down in a cloud to meet Moses and the seventy elders; for the commissioning of Joshua again the Lord appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud; in the temple commissioning the glory of the Lord filled the temple so that the priests could not perform their service.⁴

In the Jewish tradition then, there was a strong association of clouds with the glory of God - and the disciples would have known that.

So here, the Father speaks from the radiant cloud and identifies Jesus: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

² Malachi 4:4-5

³ Luke 20:38

⁴ Exodus 24:15-16; Exodus 33:9; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 11:24-25; Deuteronomy 31:15; 1 Kings 8:11

This is a clear parallel to the prophecy of “The Prophet” like Moses who would come:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.⁵

Peter refers to it in his second Epistle when he referred to the voice at Jesus’ baptism and this transfiguration event:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.⁶

It is a well-attested account of an extraordinary event. Peter tells us it is not made up but he was an eye-witness to it. We need to take seriously the claims of the apostles. Peter was rebuked God when he was proposing to build three tabernacles or shelters one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Why? Well I note that Peter suggested it as Moses and Elijah were leaving - it seems that he was trying to keep them there. By wanting to build shelters for each of them perhaps he was seeing them as equals with Jesus. But Jesus is not equal with Moses or Elijah, he is God incarnate.

How often do people seek to reduce who Jesus is and present him in acceptable terms to their human thinking? Don’t minimize who Jesus is. God commanded they to listen to Jesus. We too need to attend to his words and his ways. Not to try to conform him to our ideas but respond humbly that we might repent and believe. Jesus alone is the true Prophet, the Chosen Servant, the Son of God.

We are to be changed

Our Epistle reading from Philippians ties in with our resurrection thinking when Paul wrote:

... our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.⁷

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.

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⁵ Deuteronomy 18:15

⁶ 2 Peter 1:16-18

⁷ Philippians 3:20-21