

14.2.21 St Thomas Zoom – Transfiguration gospel

There are two young caterpillars, sitting on a leaf, munching reflectively away at it. Just at that moment, a beautiful butterfly flutters past. One caterpillar watches it with curiosity, thinks for a moment and says to the other 'Nah, you'd never catch me going up in one of those'...

As humans, we're often inherently suspicious or resistant to change – perhaps a bit like those caterpillars.

We heard in our gospel this morning, about Jesus being transfigured, being changed visually in front of his disciples. They were clearly aghast and terrified. Peter in his panic resorted to practicality, suggesting building some dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

So was Jesus himself changed by this? For sure, he *looked* different momentarily as 'his clothes became dazzling white'. Luke's account mentions that Jesus' face changed too. But being part of God, makes Jesus unchangeable. In the transfiguration, the lasting change was to the disciples' perception of him. Luke's account tells that they 'fell to the ground and were overcome by fear'. If Peter, James or John had had any shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Son of God, they couldn't have asked for much more evidence than this, to prove that he was!

Perhaps it's not only those close disciples who can be changed by this. Rowan Williams write, in a reflection of the icon of the transfiguration, that 'looking at Jesus seriously changes things; if we do not want to be changed, it is better not to look too hard or too long'. Powerful words.

It is interesting to note that the transfiguration occurred after Jesus had let Peter, James and John 'up a high mountain apart, by themselves'... I wonder if this is

from where the phrase 'mountain top experience' originates. Can we recall any such times in our own lives?

When I was a student, I confess that I wanted to be what I thought was a 'trendy' Christian. I went to a church where everyone seemed young, perfect, constantly happy and vociferously overflowing with their certainty of and love for God. I'm not trying to criticise, because there's much to be said for energy and joy, but the overall feeling seemed to be that to be a 'real' Christian, your life had to be a permanent, ecstatic mountaintop experience. If you didn't FEEL it, then you weren't 'right with God'. It was very easy to feel inadequate, I found!

Somewhat comfortingly, the theologian Henry Drummond writes 'God does not make the mountaintops, for us to *live* on the mountaintops. It is not God's desire that we live on the mountaintops. We only ascend to the heights to catch a broader vision of the earthly surroundings below. But we don't live there. We don't tarry there. The streams begin in the uplands, but these streams quickly descend to gladden the valleys below'.

Most of our life is lived in the valleys. Some valleys feel very deep and dark. Some might appear shallow from a distance. But we can surely be sustained and equipped by the fruits of our glimpses and transfigurational moments, if we are willing.

I find this sonnet by Malcolm Guite entitled Transfiguration, sums up the wonder and mystery of the event:

For that one moment, 'in and out of time',
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.

The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leapt up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.

Amen