

Talk Austrey 23rd February 2020

Readings [Exodus 24: 12-18](#) and [Matthew 17: 1-9](#)

Today I'll be talking about change – mostly. We all embrace change – right!

When I first read through the readings for today, especially the transfiguration of Jesus, I decided to try and read around the subject to see what else I could find. The only other reference I could find, other than those about Jesus was this quote, "If only we'd done human transfiguration already! But I don't think we start that until sixth year, and it can go badly wrong if you don't know what you're doing." Hermione Granger from Harry Potter. I'm not really a Harry Potter fan, never having read the books or seen the films. I do remember when they became very popular with primary school age children and on the first day of publication a dozen or so identical pristine books arrived in the classroom most of which had no name inside which you might think would not be a problem. It was! The child who thought someone had picked up the wrong book can cause enormous bad feeling but you soon learn to be prepared by ensuring that every book is named as it arrives. I will always, however, be grateful to J. K Rowling for the obvious encouragement her books gave most children, especially reluctant boys, to read for pleasure.

As I continued to read around the subject of transfiguration it seems that the opportunities and advice for changing oneself is endless. No time here to tell you the many ways, not only for ladies to be transfigured but men also. I'll just tell you of a couple. I recently read that John Lewis & Partners has become the first high street store to launch a make-up counter dedicated to male make-up. The department store is currently stocking a selection of foundations, concealers, bronzer and brushes in the menswear section of its Oxford Street flagship store. (I haven't a clue what any of those are.) So, if any of us men feel the need to be transfigured, we know where to look.

The other one was on how to be transfigured from the inside and gave these pieces of advice: Let's try them out now in our pews.

1. Take some exercise (ok shuffle your feet – ok that's enough)
2. Give some compliments (you could compliment the person next to you etc.)
3. Wear a smile
4. Give yourself a pep talk and point out your good points. (Ok after 3.....)
5. Don't self-sabotage by dwelling on your negatives (less said the better)
6. Be careful how you do the next one!
Cut out toxic people from your life i.e. people who have a bad effect on your self esteem
7. Practice laughing and joking (Again after 3.....)
8. Fake being confident until it becomes who you really are
9. Have a substantial wardrobe

10. Stand up straight and walk tall.

I saw these on the internet, possibly Pinterest, and whereas some of the advice may or may not be useful some others don't seem very Christian to me.

I started to think more about what was behind the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain, in Matt 17 v5 we read, "a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" These words are almost identical to the words spoken by God at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist with the addition of "Listen to Him".

We have, and probably have always had, a fairly good idea of Jesus life, death and resurrection even if our background was not particularly religious but to the people alive at the time of Jesus it must have seemed that he was a remarkable son of a carpenter. We here today, revere Jesus as God's only son but to the disciples this was a gradual awareness and a shock. In Matthew 16 (the chapter before today's reading) Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am" and Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." WELL DONE PETER. Jesus is well pleased and changes his name from Simon to Peter meaning Rock and says, "You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church."

But then almost in the next breath as Jesus goes on to describe his death and resurrection we are told, "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" This shall never happen to you." Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Poor Peter, he could be so spot on in his assessment of the situation one minute and the next he had fallen off a cliff edge. So, for Peter and the rest of the disciples it was a gradual awareness of who Jesus is and at times a shocking revelation.

*We read in Matt 17 v3 "Just then there appeared before them (the disciples) Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. The Transfiguration was in fact a foretaste of heaven with Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. Our God is God of the living. Moses had died centuries earlier and Elijah had been taken into Heaven. Here was Jesus talking to the two greatest living prophets in the old Testament. Moses represents the law, or the old covenant, and Elijah represents the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah, Jesus who through his death and resurrection made available the new covenant of forgiveness with God and eternal life. And what notable thing were Jesus, Moses and Elijah doing?

Talking. Talking to one another. In God's world talking is important, it's significant, it counts highly. People are individuals, with minds, hearts and opinions. People are all part of a wider whole, connected by relationships built on sharing between whole persons. Friendship is the key. We should make time and look for opportunities to talk to others. It's important. Good conversations act as training for eternity. I speak as one who's often not very good at conversational activity. When Lyn and I started coming to this church we were invited to go to a Bible Group at David and Hazel Hedley's house and two things surprised me. The first was that, week in and week out, after the Bible study they offered

refreshments and biscuits or cake, freely with no invitation to make a donation, because they counted us as friends and the other was that we were such a diverse group in terms of age, attitude, outlook, employment etc. In fact, I believe the only thing we did have in common was our shared belief in God and a willingness to be changed.

Being willing to change is, I think key. Jesus was calling Peter to change, calling him to a new future, to change his understanding of God and to accept a new way of life. Jesus is pointing Peter towards the cross and that is difficult because it involves loss. I have heard people say “I’m too old to change now” or “People always resist change”, but Professor Ron Heifetz says, “It is not really true. People are not stupid. People love change when they know it is a good thing. No one gives back a winning lottery ticket. What people resist is not change per se, but loss. When change involves real or potential loss, people hold on to what they have and resist change.”

Remember what Peter said in our gospel reading, “Lord it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Isn’t Peter saying he wants to hold onto what he has, to hold on to the past because change involves suffering, death and loss!

Sometimes we too resist change because it involves loss! When someone you love has died, or you’ve changed jobs or career, or retired, or you’ve sent your child to college or university, or you’ve had a baby, then you know that change (even good change) involves loss. Should we resist change because of our fear of loss? We are earnestly hoping and praying for a new vicar who will come – **eventually** and when he or she does come shall we all heave a sigh of relief and say thank goodness, now things can go back to being the way they were before. I, for one hope not, because many of us have changed and are changing our focus towards God.

Winston Churchill said, “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often”. He is actually repeating Jesus’ words “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.” The Greek word for perfect is “telos” which means becoming or changing.

At the start of Epiphany, we remembered Jesus’ baptism when God said, “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased”. Mark’s gospel records similar words being spoken by the Roman Centurion near the foot of the cross. I remember seeing the old film years ago in which John Wayne said those words, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” Had he been on guard duty that day or perhaps he even assisted in nailing Jesus to the cross. Jesus on the cross had changed that Centurion forever, even though he must have seen similar events many times.

The cross does have a way of changing people and we are people of change. So, on Wednesday we begin the new season of Lent. Some of us will see Lent as an opportunity to change by removing a bad habit while others of us may add to our daily routine by taking on a new spiritual discipline such as setting aside a few minutes in a quiet space in our home for prayer and contemplation or start reading our bibles with a daily devotional book such as UCB’s Word for Today.

We may find that these small changes during Lent help us to think about the cross. I sometimes think of all the people who have worshipped in churches in our parish during the last 2000 years. What we can learn from them is that when our focus turns toward the cross it can change our lives. And that's a change we can all believe in.

*some ideas taken from NIV Life Application Study Bible