

Lent 2 Year B 2021

Transfiguration

'Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John'.

Six days later than what or when? Well, it is six days after what many consider to be the pivotal point of Mark's Gospel, it is called '*the confession of Peter*'. Not confession in the sense of owning up to something - 'yes, it was me that raided the freezer and took the last of the ice-cream' - but confession in the sense of making a declaration of faith - *a statement of religious belief*, as the Chambers Dictionary has it.

Jesus, the twelve and a crowd of hangers on are on their way to Jerusalem, and Jesus asks them (the disciples) 'Who do people say that I am?' The disciples list the candidates, and then comes the second question 'Who do you say that I am?' And Peter speaks for them - 'You are the Messiah'. And Jesus strongly tells them not to tell anyone about this - but he neither confirms nor denies what Peter has said. Instead he tells them that he will go to Jerusalem, be handed over and will be killed - and that he will rise again. Peter is aghast - this isn't what should happen to his leader - and he (Peter) is strongly rebuked - 'Get behind me, Satan'. Jesus tells them that his followers will be those carry

crosses, those who are prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of his good news, and that some of them would not taste death until they had seen that 'the kingdom of God has come with power (M9.1)'

And then Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a high mountain. Is this where the three of them are going to see the kingdom come in its power? All three synoptic Gospels record this event, which we call the Transfiguration. And yet, they all struggle to describe it. Mark is particularly brief. Jesus' clothes shone white, two figures appear, whom the disciples identify as Elijah and Moses, the first great prophet and the Law giver, and the itinerant preacher/healer from Nazareth stands with them - the one they have recently confessed as 'Messiah'. The whole salvation purpose of God stands before them - and their confession is affirmed. 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him'. The words are addressed to the disciples. They had confessed Jesus as Messiah and now, on the mountain, they could see and hear the significance of that confession. Whatever else happened in their lives, the doubts, the opposition, the failure, the desertion, whatever else happened, they would never, ever doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

The transfiguration marks a moment of transition in Mark's Gospel. Before this event, Jesus had been teaching and instructing the crowds, healing the sick and demonstrating, for those who had eyes to see, that the kingdom of God had come amongst them. After this point, Jesus spends most of his time with the disciples, teaching and encouraging them, preparing them for what lies ahead, as he heads towards Jerusalem. There are few miracles and much more about the meaning of the events which are about to happen in the city. The easy bit, the exciting bit, is over; now they will learn (probably the hard way) what it means to follow Jesus. The problem for the disciples is that their appreciation of what was meant by 'Messiah' is quite different to what Jesus thought 'Messiah' meant. Perhaps that is why he doesn't want them to tell people that he is the Messiah - that could raise unrealistic expectations amongst the crowd - kingship, rebellion, expulsion of the Romans - the things he always insisted were not on his agenda. Peter had tried to persuade him to abandon any thought of suffering and death (completely ignoring Jesus' words about rising on the third day). James and Joh will shortly ask him for a guarantee that, when he comes into his kingdom, they can sit at his right and left hand

side - positions of honour and power. Even though they had seen him transfigured and heard the words of God, they still don't understand what he is about - they are still thinking of military victory and an earthly kingdom. God has told them to listen to Jesus, but they won't hear; they are too wound up in their own pre-conceptions and their determination to be proved right. The disciples inability to grasp who Jesus is could have been devastating for him - 'we have come all this way, I've shown you so much, taught you so much, and you still don't understand' - but there is someone who gets his name right and that someone is his Father - He doesn't call Jesus 'Messiah', He calls him 'My Son, the Beloved'. Confirmed, as he was at his baptism, he knows that he must take the road to Jerusalem, the most difficult road of his life. It is the affirmation of who he is by his Father which transfigures Jesus.

But this is not the only transfiguration in the Gospels; it is something which happens over and over again. Throughout his ministry Jesus transfigured people - the wounded, the wayward, the broken - and he did it in the power of God's love. He spoke to people *in love*, he touched people *in love*, he fed people *in love*, he banished fear *in love*, and he rehabilitated and restored people *in*

*love. And in love he calls us to transfigure and be transfigured.*

*What would it take to transfigure you? me? us?. What would it take to transfigure those we know, even (perhaps especially) our society? Who calls our name in love? Who calls our name in love?*

*During our Lenten journey we are asked to transfigure each other by the power of God's love in us; we are called to a ministry of transfiguration. We are asked to 'listen to him' as he asks us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, to wash each other's feet, and above all, to love one another.*

*He never asks us to worship him, he asks us to follow him in the way, the way which could lead to the cross, the way which will certainly lead to Jesus who is both the way and the destination of our pilgrimage.*