

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 2 March 2025

A Reflection by Rev Carolyn Thornley

Epiphany 8C

Luke 9: 37 - 43; Contemporary Reading: *Transfiguration by Malcolm Guite*

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

Thank you for the welcome.

Let's pray – May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

Mountain tops, Celtic Thin Places and the quickening deep within that brings change.

Today marks the end of Epiphany, a time of God's revelation when we experienced God's larger work and purposes. There's a shared excitement. "*Hey Look*".

And then we get caught up in this account from Luke embedded in prayer. Prayer being communion with God. Following this is the encounter with the boy isolated from the community because of his problems.

So often, each year, the reading is stand-alone about the Transfiguration. I have opted that the passage that follows is also read for reasons that relate to us as disciples of Christ.

Before I came into ministry I was a member of the Ecumenical Council's Overseas Mission Group and was asked on their behalf to represent the Council at a Meeting in the Philippines regarding support for projects. For me this was an amazing experience: staying with the Tondo Community living in shacks on the wharf in Manila and a Peasant community in Mindanao. In both places I joined leaders and organisers visiting projects and in their communications and interactions. I felt overwhelmed by the glory of God in the daily activities being carried out by local Christians in these communities. There was this joy, delight and hope giving, even though life was hard and I was humbled by the experience. I saw God's radiance lighting life and lifting these people from the shadows of society.

In today's passage Peter, James and John were mesmerised or overcome, just as I was.

Here they have accompanied Jesus up the mountain to pray. Even though the three of them are exhausted and really tired they noticed Jesus' face change and the dazzling white. They also notice the two figures, Moses representing law and Elijah representing prophecy, sort of like a peer relationship, talking with Jesus about his departure. As the figures disappeared Peter suggests that they build three dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah – a harking back to the Feast of Booths and Tabernacles which symbolised a time of rest and God's protection during wanderings in the wilderness.

Maybe this was an inappropriate suggestion. Could Peter have been just half asleep or does he still not understand? There is an inkling that they are gob smacked and don't fully understand even though Jesus has been trying to explain what is going to happen in the future.

Claudio Carvalhaes, a Professor at Union Seminary in New York calls the Transfiguration story "magical realism" as there are different levels of reality working at the same time. Jesus/God, Moses, Elijah, the disciples and all their different presences and expectations. The people and other presences are ways that figure, disfigure, unfigure and transfigure.

Does this resonate with any or your experiences?

"Hey look"

Here are the theological realities and social consequences. Here is the trinity wrapped up in glory that gives meaning to past and future events. They disappear into the shadow or cloud and hear the voice affirming Jesus, *"my Son, my Chosen, listen to him"*. Yes this is a sacred time so please hold silence. And then metamorphosis, changing or transforming those who go through the event.

I'm sure you have all had mountain top or Celtic thin place experiences that invite you to wonder, reflect, ask yourself questions and you feel the urge or pull to respond in action somewhat.

Jesus comes back down the mountain into the valley or plains - in other words the ordinariness of life, into the lives of the people where he is immediately faced with particular situations. I suppose you could say that this is a reminder that God will deliver God's people from slavery.

Barbara Brown Taylor in *"An Altar of the World"* says, *"In the Bible, people encounter God under shady oak trees, on riverbanks, at the tops of mountains, and in long stretches of barren wilderness. God shows up in whirlwinds, starry skies, burning bushes and perfect strangers. When people want to know more about God, the son of God tells them to pay attention to the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, to women kneading bread and workers lining up for their pay."*

The story related in Luke demonstrates an honouring, rejoicing, exulting and magnificence. Surely this is the manifestation of God's presence perceived by humans. A beauty of God's Spirit and a grandeur of many perfections.

But; the big but. We can't leave the story there because mountain top experiences and Celtic thin places throw us into the quickening deep within bringing change.

So where does this lead us?

I think it leads us to the second part of the text read to us today. The story of the boy in what Carvahlaes calls psychological and social chains. Unfortunately the disciples couldn't deal with this. So Jesus rebukes them and those gathered around this father and his son, telling them in words from The Message, *"What a generation. No sense of God! No focus to your lives! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring your son here."*

At this point Jesus stepped in, ordered the vile spirit to leave and handed him back to his father. The crowd stood there in wonder, astonished at God's majestic greatness. Just as Peter, James and John and I were mesmerised by the Glory of God, the manifestation of God's presence.

So we also go back into the ordinariness of life. The homelessness we are faced with everyday as we come into the city but also our own communities, the poor being what Carvahlaes says, dashed by the rocks of despair, the economy controlled by a few demons and those who have never experienced the lack of equity, the refugees seeking safety but refused entry into our country, and all who are trying desperately to make ends meet and yet being thrown into the shadows of our society and minority groups being targeted constantly while the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

So how do we experience being transfigured?

Certainly not being in our tabernacles, seeking rest and protection. There are pressing needs around us. We are called to pay attention to the lilies of the field, the earth groaning because of climate change, women kneading bread, suffering domestic violence, workers lining up for their pay, the horrors of gambling in Australia – probably the highest in the world.

As I stand here in this place I experience a sense of pride in the light of God's glory that you, as a congregation, have upheld the dignity of all God's family.

If we can't shed light into the lives of some of the pressing needs around us then we haven't understood the Transfiguration Story and what transfiguration really means.

When do you pay attention to what is around you or feel that trembling and tingling skin as Malcolm Guite says?

When do you sense God's presence calling you to act or shed the light of God into particular situations?

We are called by God as disciples to invite people out of the shadows and into the light, offering hope, bread, wine, help, liberation and love.

May God's light be with you.

Amen.