

What does it look like when we have been touched by God? How can we tell that God is with us? These are questions which seem to have perplexed those of us with faith since the beginning of our encounter with God. Today we have heard three stories which all relate to how we can see that one has been in the presence of God.

In the story of Moses, the writer leaves no doubt that Moses has seen God – he glows! I suspect that this must have been quite alarming for some, but this was not why Moses wore a veil. Rather many commentators reflect that the veil was a symbol of the line between the spiritual and the earthly – when Moses was doing Godly things he removed the veil, and other times the veil remained in place. Paul has a slightly different take on this -

*‘Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside<sup>1</sup>.’* Paul uses the example of Moses who having sat in God’s presence glows – to challenge how we live after we experience Christ. Paul says this should not be the behaviour of those who have seen Christ, or work within the community of faith should emulate – rather they should let the light shine. We should act in boldness and not hide what we know or have experienced. In other words – we are encouraged to feel confident in sharing all that we are undertaking in the name of Christ – and in doing so make a difference to the world around us, and we don’t need to do this alone – which is the power of today’s gospel.

The power of the story of the transfiguration is that it highlights the need for community. Jesus is transfigured – not on his own – but in community with Elijah and Moses - A glory that is shared, that illuminates each other, that strengthens each other’s lives, and gives meaning to the past and future events<sup>2</sup>. One of the lessons of this text is that the glory of God is only possible if lived together, in community. Jesus shines in the transfiguration when he is standing in dialogue with Moses and Elijah. When he is talking with the past, and of the hope of the future. This is true too of us – we cannot shine on our own – rather we shine when we work together – and it is only working together make sense of the pain of this world.

This week in the Church of England we have been celebrating 25 years since the ordination of women. It has been a celebration of the diversity and richness of all who may serve God. In a sense a celebration of our ability to help one another shine, that gender is not a barrier to the call – or our ability to help others shine.

In the same week that this was taking place I attended 3 meetings where there was a re-occurring agenda item – the 5 guiding principles and allowing all in ministry to flourish in the church of God. The five guiding principles are the agreement of how we work with difference, they allow for how a parish or an individual priest can ask for alternative oversight, rather than have to endure the ministry of women.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3: 12 and 13

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2756](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2756)

To be honest I find these quite difficult – I do not expect everyone to agree with me, but it is hard a times to accept that others do not believe I and other women have the right to shine God’s light in particular ways. The image of talking with the past and the future encourages me at this point, the image of the transfiguration in so many ways is a vision of us all flourishing regardless of our gender, race, sexuality or any other human construct. But holding onto the vision is challenging at times.

One of the other powers of these biblical story is that they remind us that we did not invent Christianity. We are not the first community here at St Anne’s – there are those who have gone before – and we hope those who will come after – and we need to be in dialogue with each other as we attempt to work out how to deal with the challenges that face us.

The disciples saw Jesus transfigured, the Israelites looked upon the brightness of Moses face, where are we reminded or the wonder and mystery of God? And when we encounter such wonder, are we tempted to hide it behind a veil – or do we as Paul suggests have the courage to let others see what we have seen, experience what we have experienced?

Today we stand just 2 days from the start of Lent. Lent takes courage. It takes discipline and it invites us to reflect on how we live out our boldness in Christ. Lent in some ways is about bringing us back to the reality of our faith – it is a time to remember the encounters that help us to shine, and to allow ourselves to shine again – a time to focus on what is important to us – our discipleship in Christ.

So often when we read the story of the transfiguration we focus on the transforming of Jesus and Peter’s response – but as we approach Lent this year we are invited to look beyond the transfiguration to how we live our faith. To think about times when we have encountered Jesus, or maybe allowing space for us to hear our encounter with Jesus now – and then to consider what we do with that.

Lent is a time for us to re-centre our discipleship. When Jesus took those three disciples up the mountain they saw a vision that would sustain them throughout their whole life and ministry and re-affirm what they knew to be true that Jesus was the son of God. I hope Lent does that for us too.

In the coming days I hope you will consider the shape your Lenten disciple will take. There are lots of resources at the back of church. Lent should prepare us to re-affirm our own vows at the Easter Vigil. It is a time for penance and reconciliation – a time to restore relationships and our sense of peace in the church and in all our relationships.

Lent is a time when we fast, focus and prepare for the mystery of Holy week and Easter – and it is a time when we focus our charity – how we share what we have in the midst of our faith. This may be in practical or financial ways, including the Lent appeal.

But we are also asking one another to take the 40 bags in 40 days challenge. This is a bit like a practical purge. It is intended to help us focus on what things we need to get rid of to allow us to be wonderful people God has created us to be. This could be just getting rid of clutter in your house; but you are invited for it to be more than this, ditching emails or habits that take time which could be focused on prayer or family or helping others. It may even involve a journey of forgiveness. For each of us our response to this challenge will be different.

Every year on the last Sunday before Lent, we hear these same stories. And like Lent itself the danger is that it becomes so familiar we don't take time to consider how we might respond, or even to think what might be different this time.

One of the things which I love about the liturgical year is that we move through familiar seasons, one after the other, and we know what will come next. The danger of course is that we just go through the motions, we do the same thing that we did last year (if we can remember what that was); the danger is that familiarity can breed contempt and we don't take time to think about the season or the readings in a new way. To consider how we respond to them in the ways that our life has changed. For some of us, our lives are dramatically different this March, to how they were this time year – how does that impact on the way that we face another Lenten journey.

During the week a friend emailed me a line from a prayer they had heard at the opening of a conference of clergy in Australia. The prayer said, "*Speak to us beyond our cynicism, whose only offspring is despair.*" Maybe we should have a similar prayer before we begin the process of preparing for Lent. God speak to us beyond the familiar, and beyond what we expect to happen!

Our faith in Christ is who we are, and Lent gives us 40 days to be very clear about that. To take time to spend with God and to focus on our relationships in faith – and like the disciple's question what all this could mean in our lives. Amen.