

Our three readings today are stories of revelation – though the word transfiguration is used – this is a special kind of revealing when the light and potential of the person shines out revealing not only them, but the potential God has placed within them; and the journey which is ahead. A vision of transcendent love! (not a bad image for valentine’s day). The story of the transfiguration is one that we hear twice in the liturgical calendar each year because it has so much to offer as we learn more about Jesus in our lives. The point of the Gospel stories is that they help us to understand ourselves and our faith. In each gospel story we meet Christ and ourselves simultaneously. In reality, however, because we change, so do the gospel stories – not in their content – but in the way we respond, and what we learn about ourselves each time we encounter the stories of Jesus.

On Tuesday I attended or listened to a conversation as part of the adult learning program at St Paul’s Cathedral between Bishop Sarah and Paula Gooder. Bishop Sarah was reflecting on the theme of *Rooted in Love* which is the title of the Lent book she edited which includes contributions from all the London Bishop’s. It will also form the basis of our Lent study, which is why I thought it might be useful to listen to the interview. She reflected on what it means to have a life in Christ – speaking of different experiences in her own life when she was grounded and confident of who she was, because she assured that belonged to God – or that some part of her identity was shaped by her relationship with God. She reflected on the importance of a routine of prayer, bible study and sharing stories of faith had been so vital for her not just in times of challenge like we have experienced in the past twelve months; but the important of this rhythm and routine for every phase of life. She also alluded to those things that sustains, the visions or experience which hold us, long after they have ended. Being rooted or grounded in God doesn’t just happen, it takes relationships, time and stories to maintain.

I found this really helpful, especially as come again to the story of the transfiguration; and of Elijah’s ascension; both visions of glory which have power long after the actual event.

The transfiguration is that moment when Jesus divinity is revealed to his 3 closest friends, in a spectacular radiance of light, linking Jesus with the tradition and prophets, while at the same time indicating they have entered a new era. Many of us will have of heard many sermons on different aspects of this. As I reflected on what Bishop Sarah had said, I realised how this is such a good glimpse of what being rooted in love might look like – the sharing of experience with those we trust as we come to pray; a vision which might sustain in times that are more barren. When we come in prayer each day, we may not see shining figures from the past like the disciples; but we may get insight into ourselves and the identity God brings.

In this story there is a glimpse of something spectacular. It is bewildering and confusing – but like all prayer, if we can stay in the moment we may find a deeper truth about life than we ever thought possible.

In Mark's Gospel, which is quite different from the accounts in Matthew and Luke, the story of the transfiguration is full of concealment and secrecy, yet the Transfiguration says that this Jesus has plans to be conspicuous¹. Again, like many of the stories throughout Epiphany, what is revealed in the action of the transfiguration is the nature of Jesus. He may be hard to see clearly in all his intricate detail, with the radiant glare and the transfigured body, but in this vision is of Jesus – who is placed in Christological context.

One of the things I like about the transfiguration is that it holds that moment between humanity and divinity – a place that we have hold in our faith at all times. There will be days and times when we feel totally human, maybe even separate from our understanding of God. There will also be those times when we have a sense of the divine – when our humanness feels distant and our sense of God seems to be pervading. But often both of these experiences might happen in the course of one day or moment – times when God feels close and times when God feels far away. In some way the transfiguration seems to hold both of these things together in a reality of messy-ness rather than some kind of divine impossibility.

In second kings we meet Elijah and Elisha who are miracle-working prophets and their exploits will have no equal until the miracles of Jesus. Hebrew readings see Elijah and Elisha as one of the pairs of great men who lead each generation from Moses and Aaron to the time of rabbinic period. Indeed, Moses is Elijah's miracle-working forbear. Elijah demonstrates his connection to Moses by parting the waters of the Jordan as Moses did the Red Sea².

As Elijah is taken up in the whirlwind, having completed his turn as prophetic leader, and also as mentor - Elisha is left in a new role with the larger-than-life legacy of his predecessor looming over him. Here, Elisha has his own transfiguration experience. As Elijah is taken and Elisha is left alone; he retains only the vision of what has happened and Elijah's cloak, once dropped on his shoulders when he became Elijah's assistant (1 Kings 19:19-21) and now is his very own. Elisha; like the disciples many years later must respond to this vision and embrace it – allowing it to inform the mission they are then called to follow.

It is no accident that we hear these readings on the last Sunday before Lent – for Lent

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2341

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3562

Last Sunday before Lent (Year B)
2 Kings 2:1-12 ; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and Mark 9: 2-9

is a time which holds humanity and divinity in focus. A time to focus on what sustains us, what encourages us, what helps us to be grounded in God's love.

Yesterday I was hosting a training session for Curates in the Willesden area. The topic for yesterday revolved around working with Trauma- with particular emphasis on the trauma of the pandemic on individuals and communities. It was salutary and helpful as we worked through the material. One of the sessions focused on the lament held in the psalms and the need for all of us to follow this pattern of naming before God the pain of our experiences. But the facilitator also pointed out that the lamenting psalms grounded their cry in a lasting vision of God. The psalmist cried out to a God they had known as present. They could cry out because they had been grounded.

This year I suspect the season of Lent will be poignant for us all as we come in this season to the one year anniversary of the first lock down. It is going to be a time of transition for many of us, as we learn what it means to live in a world that has changed so much in the past twelve months. But like the image of the transfiguration of Jesus, and that that of Elijah being take up before Elisha, we need to be open to where the new journey will take us; and what we will do with the experiences we have had along the way. How we will name our shock, anger and frustration; as well as the visions of hope and transcendence we may have encountered along the way. To do this we need to return each day to what grounds us; which hopefully is a faith and prayer.

Bishop Sarah suggested that part of this must be us each having the courage to share our own experiences of the past year, and how our rootedness in God's love has held us.

Our faith in Christ is who we are, the transfiguration reflects that, and Lent gives us a period of time to take stock as we come again to the stories of Jesus death and resurrection. It gives us a space like the lamenting psalmist to recognise who God is, to focus on that relationship and even cry out; but may it also be a time that gives us courage to share our stories of what grounds us in God's love.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us come to you. Amen.