

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Matt 17:1-9)

26.02.2017

Prayer

Where were you when you heard the news of President Kennedy's assassination or where were you when you heard of the news of the awful events of 9/11. These are questions which people may answer very well. Often people remember where they were and what they were doing, because the importance of such happenings have many repercussions and become very significant – indeed they become much talked about.

On Thursday 7th. July, 2005 Cliff, a very good friend, and myself set off on one of our weekly walks. We parked our car by the Meldon reservoir so that we could approach the roof of Dartmoor, High Willhays, following the West Okemont River. We came to Black a Tor Copse, a breath taking valley where gnarled branches of oak trees provided an eery, spiritual feel to the landscape. Leaving the valley, we headed towards Lints Tor walking through some of the wildest parts of Dartmoor. High Willhayes, itself, the highest point of the moor, presented magnificent, panoramic views on that day. Actually Yes Tor, only two metres lower, which lies just north of High Willhays, was

even more impressive. It was a glorious, God-given moment, standing on Yes Tor..and then the news. Three other men stood on that Tor, who told us of the bomb explosions that morning in London, our first hearing of the terrible events of 7/7. Where were you when you first heard of London's nightmare day? In the wink of an eye we had gone from our mountain top experience of God to the valley of horrors – a moment I won't forget.

At the start of our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus leads Peter, James and John up a high mountain, where no doubt the views were also magnificent. Yet even greater glory was then revealed as Jesus was transfigured before the three disciples. Sunlight poured from his face and his clothes were filled with light. What a sight! What a mountain top experience! Malcolm Guite, writing as one of the chosen three, wrote:

“The love that dances at the heart of things

Shone out upon us from a human face

And to that light, the light in us leaped up

We felt it quicken deep within.”

Mountain tops are often seen as places of prayer. In the gospels Jesus will go off alone to a high

place to pray. It is on mountain tops that you might best encounter and see God, that you might stand and listen to God, that indeed you might be touched by God. St. David, (whom we remember today and who is celebrated by the church this Wednesday, March 1st), also experienced a transfiguration. A great crowd had gathered around the Welsh bishop to listen to his words. Many were finding it both difficult to see and hear him, when a white dove landed on St David's shoulder. As it did the ground on which he stood is said to have risen up to form a mighty hill, making it possible for all to see and hear him. Today a church stands on the crest of this special hill. The transfigured David often appears, perhaps in stained glass windows, with a white dove on his shoulder.

But I want to take you back to the first three words of this morning's gospel: "Six days later." What had happened six days before our Lord was transfigured on that mountain top? Six days before Jesus had begun to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering, to be killed and to rise on the third day. Just a week before Peter, James and John became eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty, he had foretold them of his darkest times, of his death. And it is now, after his transfiguration, that Jesus turns his

Whose are those red-filmed eyes

And thorn-spiked head and spear-struck side?

Behold the Man; he is Man's Son."

On a mountain Jesus is revealed in glory; on a hill outside Jerusalem, he is revealed in shame. On the mountain his clothes are shining white; on the cross he has been stripped of his clothes and soldiers have gambled for them. On the mountain he is flanked by Elijah and Moses, two of the greatest of Israel's leaders, representing the law and the prophets; on Calvary Hill he is flanked by two criminals, representing how low Israel had sunk in rebellion to God. At the transfiguration a bright cloud overshadows the scene; at the scene of the cross darkness comes upon the land. On the mountain Peter babbles about how wonderful it all is; as Jesus hangs on the cross Peter is nowhere to be seen, hiding in shame, even denying he knows this man. On the mount of the transfiguration God's voice declares Jesus to be his beloved Son; on the hill of the crucifixion, a centurion declares, "Truly this man was God's Son."

Christ is often revealed in crisis points in our lives, a light shining in the darkness. And those mountain top experiences are there to help us through the valleys of despair. When we are afraid, as the

disciples were on the mountain, we must listen to Jesus, as God's voice says. We must be touched by Jesus, get up and see no one except Jesus.

At the transfiguration, the three apostles saw the glory of the Lord; they saw Jesus appointed by God as the Messiah who will come to rule and judge the world. At the crucifixion we see the lengths that Jesus will go to express his love for humankind. We must learn to see the glory in the cross; learn to see the cross in glory. We must deny ourselves, take up our own cross, showing our love for others, then we also shall see his glory. We shall be transfigured ourselves so that we can go out into the world to share his love.

"Was it a vision?

Or did we see that day the unseeable

One glory of the everlasting world

Perpetually at work, though never seen.

Bill Pattinson (21.02.2017)