

**Dorset South and West Methodist Circuit
Service for 27 February 2022, Revd Gwyneth Owen**

Transfiguration

My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

Hymn

Christ, whose glory fills the skies Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise, triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near, Daystar, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day's return, till Thy mercy's beams I see,
Till Thou inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine, pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiance divine, scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display, shining to the perfect day.
Charles Wesley 1707-1788

Prayer

As you continue to be open to God's presence, reflect on these words you have just sung, hummed or read: **'Fill me, Radiance divine'**. As you quietly sit, let those words become your prayer, focusing on:

Fill me - what do you need to let go of to make room to be filled? Name these things and let God's embrace, forgiveness and welcome, surround and indwell you. (This can't be rushed)

Radiance - imagine brightness illuminating a dark space, literally or metaphorically. Offer praise for God's radiance and picture it in your longings and experience. (Take your time)

Divine - Be amazed that you are held by God, known by God, cherished by God, the Divine. Offer thanks for who God is in your life - or who you long for God to be in your life. (Please linger a while here)

Gracious God, Radiance Divine, fill me, fill us so that we glimpse the glory of your Being. As I reflect on the life and ministry of Christ, inspire my imagination, our imaginations, so that we have eyes to see your glory in unexpected places and through unexpected people - including me, including us. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

Luke 9:28-36

The Transfiguration

28 Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31 They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33 Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. 34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” 36 When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.



Have a look at this picture by Raphael. I hope that even in black and white you can see the light of the transfiguration at the top and the darkness of daily life at the bottom. Where is God’s glory? Is it in the top half – on the transfiguration mount -or the bottom half where the 9 disciples are still struggling with the day job and facing a difficult situation with a father and his epileptic son (verses 36ff).

I believe that the transfiguration tells us something crucial about God’s being and character- two characteristics that, at first glance, seem to be opposites: **glory and brokenness**. Each week I have conversations with people who are committed Christians and who are searching for a deeper sense of God in their lives and in the life of the world. They realise that life and faith is more nuanced than a simple binary choice. I’m exploring

with you in this service that there is profound truth in holding, supposed, opposites in tension, specifically, God’s glory and God’s brokenness. This Bible passage has much to teach us, I think so let’s get to it. And 3 numbers will get us started 8,9,2

Number 8

.... 8 days later Jesus took with him Peter, James and John. That’s how the account of the transfiguration begins in Luke’s gospel – 8 days later. 8 days later from

what? you may ask. Well, let me put you out of your misery. It was 8 days after Peter had declared who Jesus was but then had been staggered to hear Jesus say he must suffer and die. It was a turning point for Jesus and his disciples and the transfiguration happened 8 days after THAT.

Number 9

There were 9 disciples missing. Jesus only took 3 with him. What are the 9 doing? Well they are getting on with the business of telling people about Christ – that God’s kingdom is dawning, that there’s hope and healing and forgiveness. They are getting on with the day job –which, by the way they struggle with at times. They have arguments with the religious leaders, for example, and come across people whose problems are too severe for them to deal with – as is the case at the bottom of this painting.

Number 2

There were 2 extras who took a short cut up the mountain: Elijah and Moses. Elijah, the great prophet; Moses the great law giver and liberator. They add to the picture dripping with symbolism: mountain, clouds, God’s voice. All of this is saying, ‘Look out, something special is happening here’.

This is drama at its best. Its message: Now look you 3, this Jesus whom you see transfigured is the same Jesus who will suffer, die and be raised from the dead – remember THAT conversation 8 days ago – and he is God, so listen to him. The story is about witnessing God’s glory in Christ –transcendent. It is placed between 2 passages that remind us of God’s suffering in Christ. God’s glory is a transcendent God who suffers.

Well, dear reader, as you look at your own life, the lives of those you love and the life of the world, you may wonder how the transfiguration account impacts on you. What I’m suggesting is that we may find the glory of God on the mountain peak and it will amaze us beyond words. In my experience this doesn’t happen often, but it happens enough to keep me searching. I’m also suggesting that we look for the glory of God as God rubs shoulders with human brokenness. I guess it’s a different kind of glory, and that is what the artist, Raphael is grasping after.

In the horrors of the trenches, the first World War padre Studdert Kennedy had to dig deep to understand who God is and he wrote this: *Thou hast bid us seek Thy glory in a criminal crucified*. There are many sermons in that one line but it says something about God coming to us in brokenness as well as in transcendent glory – and that we need to keep both in balance in our own spirituality and life.

So where does that leave you and me? I want to encourage you to open yourself to glimpse the glory of God in God’s transcendent being – as in our opening prayers today. I also want to encourage you to open yourself up to the possibility that in the grimness which is life for so many, God is to be found in brokenness

and suffering love, calling you and me to imitate Christ by continuing to offer ourselves in the service of others, however challenging that may sometimes be.

Prayers of Intercession

Pray for one place in the recent news today where people are faced with unimaginable suffering. Imagine God's pain in this suffering. Pray for life, light and hope in this situation. Pray for people who could make a difference through the mysterious influence of God's roving Spirit.

Pray for one person you know who is faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges. How might you be the means by which God's presence and love might be this person's experience?

Pray for your church, however long it is since you've been able to worship there. Pray for its witness to the transcendent glory of God as the congregation meets for worship and prayer. Pray that church leaders may be given wisdom to find God in the needs of the community and reach out in love.

Pray for yourself that you may catch glimpses of God's transcendent glory that will sustain you in the places of pain, perplexity, doubt and disappointment. Rejoice that God is present in both the light and the dark. As Lent approaches reflect on how you can intentionally be in God's presence each day.

Gracious God, receive these prayers in the name of Christ and for the flourishing of those who have been held in prayer. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

Be still for the presence of the Lord the Holy one is here
Come bow before him now in reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found we stand on Holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord the Holy one is here.

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around
He burns with Holy fire with splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal to minister His grace
No work too hard for Him in faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place
David J Evans b 1957

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May the blessing of the
triune God be our
deepest experience
today and always. Amen