

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families

Sunday 28th February 2021 at 10:30 am
2nd Sunday in Lent

Call to worship

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."
And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Hymn R&S 685

Through all the changing scenes of life. In trouble and in joy.
The praises of my God shall still my heart and tongue employ.

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, with me exalt His name;
When in distress to Him I called. He to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around. The dwellings of the just.
Deliverance He affords to all. Who on His succour trust.

Oh, make but trial of His love; Experience will decide;
How blest they are, and only they; who in His truth confide.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then; Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight; your wants shall be His care.

Prayer of Approach, Thanksgivings and Confession

Father, we all want to walk in your Light.
Please show us anything in our hearts and lives that prevent that.
Forgive us and help us to achieve all you have planned for us.
Thank you for your guidance, perseverance, strength, and patience.
We feel your inspiration in our lives and your prompting and are only too aware of our reluctance and hesitancy to follow.
Help us to do more than see the Light and accept the responsibility to become active in our faith.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer....

Readings



Genesis 17:1-7, 15, 16 – God makes a covenant with Abram

Psalms 22:23-31 – all the ends of the Earth shall remember and turn to the Lord

Mark 9:2-9 – the Transfiguration of Jesus

Romans 4:13-25 – being convinced that God was able to do as he promised

Hymn R&S 380

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; Day-star, 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 they 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, radiancy divine, Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display, Shining to the perfect day.

Reflection

How do we make sense of what we see? Usually we make our minds up before we have all the facts and have to rethink. How many of us watch a detective programme on the television, take a dislike to one of the characters, decide they did it, and find out later it was someone else? Things change. It happens to people, places, ideas, and events. It happens in our minds. We seem to remember things which now have a gloss on them which they never had at the outset. We persuade ourselves that events happen for the best because we like a positive spin on things.

We are predominantly the generation who reflect that things are not the same. I used to love to hear the stories from my grandmother about how life was when she was a little girl. It was only later that I began to think about how hard it must have been without the labour saving devices we have today. These were presented as the good old days but, upon reflection drudgery is a word that comes to mind.

Our childhood was no doubt permeated by stories of wonderful things. Remember the Ugly Duckling and Cinderella. Their misery and despair are replaced by something good. . *The ugly duckling is the classic tale of a misfit who grows up misunderstood only to finally blossom into his true self in adulthood. The Cinderella stories, which are found in the folk literature of almost every culture in the world, shows kindness and love will ultimately triumph. Little Red Riding Hood, who seems to have a remarkable escape. Then there was the story of the King's new clothes. That did not seem to fit the pattern. All these stories have something to do with transfiguration, the revelation of the "real" that is hidden by a covering which initially hides the truth.*

The story of the Transfiguration is well known and traditional interpretations suggest that it was Jesus who changed. The question we should ask perhaps is was it Jesus who changed or the way Peter, James and John saw Him and understood the purpose of His life? Moses went up the mountain and saw God face to face. He returned with a new set of rules for living. We are led to believe that his face shone as a result of the encounter. Israel and its people were transformed.

Our subject is the Transfiguration and as we read around the story in the Gospel, passages that come before it and after it, we realise this moment is the turning point of a story that leads to a cross of shame, to the stripping away of power and the emptying of self. Jesus moves from the preaching of a kingdom in which the meek inherit the earth and the pure in heart see God to the expectation of the cross. Peter, James and John, the three disciples present at this moment of exaltation, are the same three present at the moment of crisis in Gethsemane before the horrors of Calvary.

The prospect at the Transfiguration is one of rejection but it is also a glimpse of fulfilment. When Moses and Elijah appear alongside Jesus we are being asked to remember that they both went up a mountain, both brought messages that were rejected, and both passed directly into the divine presence. We are being told that Moses represents the law, and Elijah the prophets, but Jesus is the beloved son and heir who completes the law and fulfils all that the prophets foretold. In this story they both symbolically disappear, and there is an endorsement that Jesus supersedes them.

The Transfiguration looks forward. It is the time when Jesus starts to move towards His goal. The teaching part is now going to be reinforced with the action part.

So much for looking forward, The Transfiguration also looks *back*. What was unveiled through a cloud on the mountain of the Transfiguration looks back to what was revealed through a cloud in the waters of baptism: the glory shared by the Son with the Father. In both episodes of His life Jesus is supported with words of the Father.

Let's reflect to look at the signs. The Transfiguration is mediated through the sign language of Light. Light comes first and last in Scripture. We move from the first creation of light in Genesis to the light of the world in St. John's Gospel that shone in the darkness and was not overcome, to the light of Revelation that shines at the centre of the heavenly city.

Finally we have the sign of the cloud, We move from the cloud that went before the people as they travelled hopefully to a new country, to the cloud that enveloped Moses as he received the law and entered the divine presence; from the cloud that signified God was tabernacle with his people in the temple to the cloud that revealed the divine presence in the face of Jesus Christ on the mountain of the Transfiguration. The cloud hides God because man cannot see Him face to face, but it also shows God is there. The task is to see through the cloud to the God beyond.

In the final moment on the mountain the disciples 'raised their eyes and saw Jesus only'. The moment of illumination is over: redemption remains to be worked out on the plane of everyday existence, problems and difficulties that will not go away, satisfactions and heartaches, taken-for-granted familiarities and special times of mutual recognition, expectations and uncertainties, temptations, times of trial and moments of dereliction, but through it all a recollection of the human form both subject to abject humiliation and gloriously transfigured; and the guiding virtues through all the changing scenes of life identified by William Blake as pity, mercy, peace and love.

So the disciples got to see Jesus and were offered the opportunity to understand the purpose of His mission. They saw it, but did not seem to understand it. Peter wanted them all to stay where they were. The representatives of the Law and Prophets have gone leaving Jesus as the only direct link with God. The message was probably not one they wanted to hear because He represented a way forward they would not have anticipated. The Messiah was going to be the great and powerful king who would destroy Israel's enemies. Jesus was telling them He would do that, but their greater enemies are the way they live and worship not armies who occupy their streets.

We are left with the same question today as Peter, James and John were, 'What does this Messiah expect from me?'

Song for reflection

Lord, the light of your love is shining. In the midst of the darkness, shining.
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us. Set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me, shine on me

Shine, Jesus, shine! Fill this land with the Father's glory.
Blaze, Spirit, blaze! Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow! Flood the nations with grace and mercy.
Send forth your word. Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to your awesome presence. From the shadows into your radiance.
By the blood I may enter your brightness. Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on your kingly brightness. So our faces display your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory. Mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me

Prayers of Intercession

We come before you as a world in pain. Most of the things we know, that were a part of our lives have been affected by COVID. Many people have died, many have felt locked up and forgotten. Those who have relatives in care homes have largely been unable to see them. Businesses have closed, temporarily or permanently, children are being home schooled. We have discovered the real poverty in our society.

We cannot meet with others or share our thoughts. Domestic violence has increased. People are hungry, not just for food but for friendship and communion. Some children are unable to engage in on-line lessons because they have no access to appropriate equipment. Social isolation has flourished as all sorts of clubs and societies have ceased to meet.

This list is endless and it points in one direction only- as a world we have completely lost our way.

We have never been more in need of support, guidance, comfort and inspiration. We know this can only come from you but we are a world lost in statistics and medical intervention.

We turn to you in this time of trouble and torment. You are a God of Love and forgiveness, not one of data and trend. We are reaching out in the darkness to hold your hand. We pray that all those in need will find the comfort and strength to survive and to find the peace you alone can offer.

Amen

Hymn R&S 544

Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home, lead Thou me on; Keep
Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path, but now Lead Thou me on;
I loved the garish day, and spite of fears, pride ruled my will; remember not past years.

So long Thy pow'r has blest me, sure it still wilt lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile, which I have loved long since, and lost awhile

Benediction

We came together to worship God.
We have read and heard God's Word.
We have prayed and sung songs.

Now we have been up the mountain
And now we walk back with Jesus in God's world:
To be God's people wherever we are called to go.

Let us shine in God's name and for Jesus sake. Amen