

twelvebaskets



TRANSFIGURATION A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Transfiguration - Year A
19th February 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

117 STF – Sing praise to God who reigns above OR

134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

175 STF – Light of the world, you stepped into darkness OR

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining

Readings: Exodus 24:12-18; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Hymn:

259 STF – Jesus on the mountain peak OR

260 STF – Swiftly pass the clouds of glory

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

682 STF – God of grace and God of glory OR

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

83 STF – Praise, my soul, the King of heaven OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

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Call to worship

God of the waters and the mountains
God of the fires and the forests
God of the skies and the earth
God who loves all of your creation, we come to you this day.

All of us, seeking to love all of you.
As we come, broken as we are,
Come Lord Jesus, be our end and our beginning
Bring your perfect love, your love divine.
We have come, come Lord Jesus.
Amen.¹

Hymn:

117 STF – Sing praise to God who reigns above OR
134 STF – Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Opening Prayers

Living, loving God, in a world of much uncertainty and doubt, we turn to you again this Sunday.

Living, loving God, we come to you in worship, and seek to know more of your presence.

Lord, as we listen to readings from the Bible and reflections on those readings, may we hear your word to us.

As we sing and hear the music of the hymns, may we encounter something of your Spirit, dancing amongst us.

As we hold moments of quiet and calm, may we know something of your peace amongst the tumult of our everyday life.

Lord, may we respond by faith to what we hear, and use our mouths to share who you are.

May we tell of your good deeds and love, and inspire faith in those around us.

Help us to have compassion for those in need, and respond in love with acts of generosity.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Today is a very special day in the life of the Church! Today is known to church-folk as "The Feast of Transfiguration" or "Transfiguration Sunday."

The story of this moment in Jesus' life brings together a lot of prophecies from the Old Testament, and brings back some familiar faces from then as well, such as Moses and Elijah! It's similar to the Avengers Movies, when they all have their own stories and plots, but they all come together in a team-up that answers some of those plots and lets you know what happens since then! Let me share with you the story:

[Read Matthew 17: 1-9 in a version that you are comfortable reading.]

That sounds like a lot happened, and might be a little confusing, so let me share it with you this way.

Imagine you are told about a butterfly. It's a beautiful butterfly, with majestic wings, is gentle, kind, and will change the world as we know it. BUT! It's not going to be around for a long time. Not next year. Or the year after. Or even the year after that! That butterfly won't even be here for 10 years! But we are excited and should wait for it to arrive!

Then, after many, many years of waiting, we hear about a caterpillar. It's a kind, gentle one that we're told is the butterfly! Many people don't believe it, or don't want the world to change. But as the caterpillar grows up, we start to see some glimpses of what the butterfly is going to be. Such as its kindness, its gentleness, its wisdom, and more!

We then get to this story in Matthew. The caterpillar goes up the mountain with its friends, and there it prays and becomes wrapped in a cocoon of the Holy Spirit. When it bursts from the cocoon, it's then that we see not only the butterfly, but the people who told us to wait for its coming. And words couldn't do justice to the beauty, the majesty of the butterfly!

Jesus is our butterfly. One that inspires peace, beauty, love and so much good in the world.

Let us pray:

Gentle God, nourish us with your word, wrap us and our friends in the cocoon of the Holy Spirit, so that we may glimpse the butterfly that is Jesus in our daily lives.

Amen.³

Hymn:

175 STF – Light of the world, you stepped into darkness OR

59 STF – Lord, the light of your love is shining

Readings: Exodus 24:12-18; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Hymn:

259 STF – Jesus on the mountain peak OR

260 STF – Swiftly pass the clouds of glory

Reflections on the readings

I wonder what you first think of when you hear the word transfiguration. I wonder what your grandchildren or children or next-door neighbour would think of first? I think there is a good chance they might think of a well-known story, but perhaps not the one from the Bible featuring Jesus. Maybe they'd think first of the one where a professor called McGonagall teaches young witches and wizards such as Harry Potter how to transfigure things, such as animals into water goblets.

Maybe you're unfamiliar with the tale of Harry Potter and spells taught in Transfiguration Class, but one similarity it has with the account of the transfiguration of Jesus we have heard today is that both are stories rich with enchantment and wonder.

How often do you find yourself able to pause for a moment in awe and wonder? How often are you enchanted by the world around you?

The Christian faith has a rich tradition of mysticism. Bernard McGinn in his book which compiles the key texts of the Christian mystics, defines Christian mysticism as: "the preparation [of a person] for, the consciousness of, and the effect of a direct and transformative presence of God." In other words, mystics are people who are intentionally seeking a direct and transformational encounter with God, or a union with God, often through contemplative spiritual practices.

You could say that the philosophy underpinning mysticism, which was at its height in Western Christianity in the Middle Ages, is one which values an openness to inexplicable spiritual or supernatural experiences. It is therefore not surprising that the Enlightenment, with a philosophy of its own that values the pursuit of reason, knowledge and understanding saw a change in the way we relate to those events in our Christian stories which the mystics related to most easily.

We can be tempted to approach events like the virgin birth, the incarnation, the transfiguration and the resurrection with our Enlightenment brains whirring, seeking out logical explanations. And yet these stories – full of wonder, enchantment, inexplicable acts of and encounters with God – are stories best read as mystics. We miss out on something of the power of these extraordinary stories if we read seeking out nothing but reason. Our own understanding will only ever get us so far.

We hear today of Moses climbing a mountain and entering a cloud to meet with God where he stayed for forty days. And of Jesus, with his disciples Peter, James, and John, climbing a mountain where Jesus' face suddenly shines like the sun, and his clothes become dazzling white and there with them are Moses and Elijah – alive centuries before the birth of Jesus - talking with them. There, on the mountaintop, time has folded in on itself, and past and present seem to be strangely overlapping, and God's voice is audible in the clouds. It is right that we find these tales extraordinary.

Yet, can we channel our inner mystics when we read these tales of supernatural encounters with God on mountaintops? We might find the details of these tales almost as hard to believe as the magic of Harry Potter – but there is a reason why the tales of this young wizard are so popular, and that's because we are a people who are craving awe, wonder, and enchantment.

Transfiguration Sunday marks the transition between the season of Epiphany and the season of Lent. Epiphany is a season where we remember the ways Jesus was revealed to the gentiles, most notably the Magi who came from the east to the stable to see the newborn Christ. Lent is a season where we remember Jesus in the desert at the very beginning of his ministry. As a society, we're very good at embracing the magic of the Christmas season, but once we've taken down the tree, recycled the cards, and packed up the crib scene we can easily slip back into an expectation of mundanity in our everyday lives. And then, in the season of Lent, we take that a step further and root out any whiff of extravagance. But here, just before we slip into the wilderness of Lent, we're reminded by Transfiguration Sunday to pay attention to the inexplicable acts of God all around us and to stand in awe and wonder at the mystery of them.

But what if we can't quite get our Enlightened selves to sit down and be quiet? What if we find ourselves wondering how exactly the events of the Bible came to be, or we can't help but desperately try to explain away the mystery with logic? Have no fear - the story of the transfiguration and the account of Moses meeting with God on the mountaintop are here to help us. Let's look at two ways in which it might.

One of the most well-known Christian mystics is Julian of Norwich who lived in permanent seclusion for nearly thirty years in a tiny cell attached to the outside wall of St Julian's Church in Norwich. Her space was small, but sacred – a place where she devoted her life to prayer and sought out union with God. In our readings today, both Jesus and Moses climb mountains for their extraordinary experiences. We know that God is with us in the ordinary, as well as the extraordinary, spaces of our lives. We know that moments of incredible connection with the divine can happen while doing the washing up, while sitting in a traffic jam, or while walking the dog. And yet, the transfiguration teaches us how, when we've made an intentional journey to a place where we expect to meet with God, we should be prepared for something remarkable to happen. And so, this is our second lesson, if we find ourselves resisting the mystic in us, and yet we long for union with God, let us go to a sacred space. In the words of the Psalm, we must go to a "holy mountain".

The Celtic Christians speak of 'thin places' where heaven and earth are closer, where God feels more tangible, where spiritual experiences happen more easily, where our stuffy, logical, reasonable, busy minds are quieted enough to notice the divine permeating the place. Today's scriptures feature such thin places. Do you have a thin place you can go, where you expect to meet with God? It might be a small space in our home or community, it might be a church, or a location outdoors. Perhaps you've already found such a place, and have met with God there. Transfiguration Sunday and our mystical reading of its story, bids you to make room in your lives for visiting such a place. As Peter's epistle tells us: "You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place." It is our task to seek out the lamp, even when our lives feel dark. So, find your own sacred space and go there, with the expectation of having an extraordinary encounter. Go there, ready to sit in awe and wonder in union with God. Go there, with your eyes and hearts and minds open to how God might be seeking to transfigure you and the world around you.

And we come to our second lesson for embracing our inner mystic on this Transfiguration Sunday. In Matthew's telling of the transfiguration which we heard today, those present on the mountaintop are "overshadowed" by a cloud, but Luke's Gospel goes further, and they "entered into it." Whichever we read, the disciples are invited to climb this mountain of transfiguration with Jesus. They are invited to participate in this supernatural experience. Just like Moses, they are called by God

into encounter, to meet together in this extraordinary moment. We too are called to participate in the wonderful presence of God.

We are reminded in these stories of awesome encounter and supernatural experience, that God invites us too to get involved, to be present to God's presence all around us. During the transfiguration of Jesus, as the disciples are perhaps properly aware for the first time that Jesus is both fully human and full of the divine – Peter's first words are: "it is good for us to be here". This strikes me as the words of a mystic. Peter does not ask how or why these events are unfolding. Peter simply recognises that he is glad to be present. How often are we simply grateful to be – just be – present in the presence of God?

Our second lesson from the transfiguration, is about willingly entering into an encounter with God and simply being present. We know that Moses remained in the cloud above the mountain for forty days. He didn't hurry back down to continue his life. He was present with God, for as long as he could be.

Now, we may not each have forty days to sit on a mountaintop, but God calls us to be present to God's presence all around us – in our sacred places and in our everyday lives. God calls us into a life of awe and wonder, of enchantment. God calls us to pay attention to the ways God is revealed and speaks to us. God calls us to be open to all the ways God transfigures us into our most true, loving, present, and authentic selves. Let us live as mystics, as disciples, as prophets: expectant of encounter with God on every mountaintop, and in every traffic jam.

Discussion questions

- What do you first think of when you hear the word transfiguration?
- How often are you enchanted by the world around you?
- Do you have a thin place you can go, where you expect to meet with God?
- In what ways are you able to be present to the presence of God all around you?⁴

Hymn:

682 STF – God of grace and God of glory OR

362 STF – Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity

Prayers of intercession

God who transfigures, you know all the ways we need your transforming grace in our lives, relationships, communities and our world. Thank you for the transfiguring work you do amongst us every day, and help us and our leaders to be open to following you into a more faithful, more loving, more whole and healed way of being.

God who meets us in the extraordinary, on the mountaintop, thank you for the miracles you perform all around us. For new life, for babies born and bulbs breaking through soil. Thank you for the miracles of science and medicine, for justice long sought and brought about, for all those working as campaigners and innovators to preserve your creation. Grant each of us the eyes and ears to notice your extraordinary work all around us, and to join in.

⁴ Reflection written by Holly Adams

God who meets us in the ordinariness of life, you know all the struggles of our days. We hold before you people in our local communities and those we know who are struggling. Whether with poor mental or physical health, anxiety, stretched finances, or concerns relating to friends or family, help them to be aware of you alongside them. Grant each of us peace we pray.

God who is ever present to us, help us to be present to you. Show us the way to notice and name you with authenticity and joy in our daily lives. Grant us the confidence we need to follow you and to share your dazzling light with others.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace, God of change,

God whose arrival in Jesus changes everything,

We give you thanks for the many gifts we have received. Help us to remember that all we have is a gift from you, help us to care for your gift of creation, and may we use these gifts to spread love throughout your world.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

83 STF – Praise, my soul, the King of heaven OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

Go out to meet a God of love.

Go out and find love at work throughout God's creation.

Go out and seek to build a better, safer, more sustainable world,

In Jesus' name.

Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Holly Adams

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker