

Transfiguration

a sermon preached on the

Last Sunday before Lent

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at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by Fr Jim McKenna

priest assistant at St Luke's
& chaplain to Bishopspark

Lection: 2 Kings 2: 1-12; Mark 9: 2-9

Experiences influence us much more than talks or lectures. Even though we may need help to analyse them, we know they affect us (for good or ill), and can continue to do so for a lifetime.

The experience on Mount Tabor had great significance, first of all for Jesus himself. It came at a crucial moment in his ministry and at the start of his journey to Jerusalem, where he knew that a violent death was waiting for him. In order to pray and reflect on it, he climbed to the top of Mount Tabor, taking Peter, James and John with him.

During Jesus time of prayer, Moses and Elijah appeared to him and spoke about his forthcoming Passion. He experienced the presence of God, and again heard the words of affirmation that he had heard at his baptism.

"This is my son – the Beloved. Listen to Him".

On the mountain Jesus felt comforted, reassured, affirmed and strengthened for the ordeal ahead. It wasn't as if everything became suddenly rosy. In fact, nothing had really changed. He still had to face death on the cross, but he knew that God would give him the strength to face this suffering.

The experience was also of great importance to Peter, James and John. It confirmed and strengthened their faith in Jesus and helped them to face the dark future with him.

On that mountain, the three apostles got a glimpse of Jesus' divinity hidden in the depths of his humanity. They were overcome with the beauty and the brilliance of it. It was not a surface thing, but an inner essence shining through. It affirmed for them that "God was in Jesus" and that his teaching of love and forgiveness was far greater than greed and evil.

There are two potentialities within us. The potentiality for evil, and the potentiality for good. If we think about the potentiality for evil we are capable of such things as : - Jealousy, envy, hatred, bitterness, cruelty and greed. These are all ugly things, and bring out the worst in us. They corrupt the heart, which distorts our appearance and darkens our eyes. Evil disfigures us.

Take our potential for good. We are capable of such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, mercy and compassion. These are beautiful things which bring out the best in us. They purify the heart, and purity of heart softens our expression and causes the eyes to shine. Goodness transfigures us.

Basically, we are transfigured by what we love, what excites us, what moves us, what rouses our spirit, what causes us to be awake and alive, what shows us at our brightest and best. At times, all of us can feel down; feelings of failure and worthlessness, but then suddenly something nice happens to us – a friend calls, we get a letter containing some good news and suddenly everything is changed. The truth of course, is that nothing has changed (like the experience of Jesus on Mount Tabor). It is just that we are uplifted, given strength and encouragement to travel the journey of life.

Like Abraham, we travel in the darkness of faith. Faith begins with a call from God. To have faith is not to have all the answers. It is to be open to the voice and will of God.

Just as the apostles were unable to understand how it was that the glory which they had glimpsed on the mountain – the glory of God's chosen Son, would finally be unveiled on Calvary, so we too, often find it completely bewildering to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of joy and sadness.

However, the words that come to us, leading us on to follow Christ, even when we haven't a clue what is going on, are the words that came from the cloud:

"This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to Him".

Amen.

j.p.mckenna@extra.co.nz