

Feast of the Transfiguration 09.08.2020
2 Peter 1.16-19; Luke 9.28-36

I was pondering! You know I was pondering as to whether or not the Transfiguration comes in the wrong place in the gospel. Wouldn't it be far more satisfying if it came at the end of the story?.. as a great climactic moment? Justice has been done, the true nature of Jesus the Christ has been revealed, God has made a public statement of approval with an audience of the greats, Moses and Elijah, and all's well with the world. Let's build some booths says Peter, so that we can continue to enjoy this moment for ever.

But the shocking thing about the Transfiguration is that after the light show subsides, Jesus goes back to looking just as he has always looked while they've been tramping around in Galilee. He comes down off the mountain to do the same things he has always done - the teaching and the healing, and setting people free from the powers that shut them out of community. The Transfiguration is great and crucially important, but somehow it starts to look fairly ho-hum because it isn't the climactic moment of Jesus ministry. It isn't the final grand and glorious act in the pivotal drama of his life. And the disciples say nothing to anybody about what they've seen. Nothing much seems to have changed.

The irony is that the disfiguring experiences we undergo often leave far more of a permanent mark than the transfiguring ones. The Feast of the Transfiguration falls on the 75th anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On this day, the future of humanity was changed for ever. Our capacity to destroy the human race and disfigure this planet irrevocably was demonstrated in the most awesomely terrible burst of light. The fact of this monument to destruction must not be hidden, must not be talked about. I was in Hiroshima last year and it was indeed a salutary experience. I wanted to make my confession as part of a race that could perpetrate such terrible thing, such a disfigurement, and I was greeted with warmth and love as we shared in a common commitment to never again.

Constantly we are aware of the disfiguring activities of our human species on one another and our environment. And of course now we view a pandemic which is raging around the world and dis-

figuring our human race. In the response that is being made to it, both at a government level in the nations of the world, in the health crisis that is engulfing so many, and in the individual personal impact as we ponder what the future might look like, we can be overwhelmed by the enormity of what's happening, of the impact it is having and will have on all our lives and those of our children. It does feel like a watershed moment in our human story. It feels like a cataclysmic disfiguring experience for our human race.

But disfigurement is part of our human experience. Most if not all of us have experienced the dramatic moments of loss; the long, slow attrition of grief; the thousand small disappointments of everyday life which kind of bend us out of shape. And it's made more difficult because we live in a culture, especially in our first world, which aspires to pleasure and ease, comfort and free of pain. 'Let's make three dwellings and live in this mountain top experience for ever'. I'm reminded of TS Eliot in The Four Quartets, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality."

But the Transfiguration **isn't** the climactic moment of the Gospel. No, the moment where Jesus' true nature is revealed for everyone to see comes much later... on the Cross.

Luke does something really interesting in his telling of the Transfiguration story. In verse 31, he says that Moses and Elijah speak of Jesus' "departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." The Greek word Luke uses is 'exodus'. To my mind, the point of that verse is to point to the fact that the revelation that will free God's people is not the spectacular stuff, not the light show and the heavenly voice.

The glory and majesty of God and our Exodus from slavery comes in Jesus' path of self-giving love, of answering violence and scorn with forgiveness and love. The ultimate expression of that of course is Jesus' love and forgiveness from the Cross-. In his life, his ministry death and resurrection he shows us the way to challenge and face all that disfigures. In Christ all that separates and injures and destroys is overcome by all that unites and heals and creates.

So the Transfiguration is in a sense just a waymark, though a profound and significant one. It is in the descent from the mountain and the manner in which Love engages with all that disfigures our

lives which actually leads to redemption, which expresses the glory and majesty of God. On this Hiroshima Day, we are called as his disciples to face all that is disfiguring ourselves and our world today, and to continue to demand and work for a vision of the world and of our lives as God's love would have it be.

It is a world where the weak are protected and none go hungry or poor; a world where all the benefits and blessings of life are shared so that everyone can enjoy them; a world where people of different races, cultures and colour, gender and sexual orientation, are all treated with dignity and respect; a world where peace is built on justice and justice is guided by love. May our lives be transfigured by the risen Christ that we may have the courage and the inspiration to build such a world.