

Transfiguration 2 Mar 2014

Exodus 24: 12-18

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1: 16 -21

Matthew, 17:1-9

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

In today's gospel we have the narrative of the 'Transfiguration' and it provides us with a timely opportunity for reflection on this the Sunday before lent, before we start our period of reflection in our movement toward the 'new creation' of Easter.

Rather than maintain the routine of 'Transfiguration Sunday' and so looking at the gospel story 'AGAIN'; we might try and look at it for the first time and ask for ourselves, what is the wisdom of this ancient narrative; what is the gospel, the good news that this story seeks to reveal to us?

First we have to re-set our compass so that we can approach the narrative in a new light; we have to let go of what we know in order to open ourselves to knowing anew.

Over the years, this, and other narratives have suffered the distortion of primitive interpretation.

The early interpretation of the Church that the gospels tell us about Jesus, distorted a deeper reality; the gospels narrate the life and teaching of Jesus that was apprehended by the early disciples and so they illustrate that which Jesus reveals to us of our truest being..

The gospels are therefore more correctly read as reflections for humanity, they seek to reveal to us who we really are.

Another re-setting of our compass, our approach to the scriptures, is to realise that they are not recorded events. Rather, they are revelations of wisdom composed at a time and within an environment whereby the audience was uneducated, unable to read and limited by the confines of a small world and a simple daily routine that allowed little opportunity for the exploration of deep space or for inner reflection.

These narratives are therefore more like the later medieval passion plays, they serve to enact and illuminate the deeper truths of life that are to be found beyond the existence of the everyday.

They reveal the extraordinary that is to be found within and beyond the ordinary.

This is perhaps easily appreciated when look at the first reading from the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament); this is a narrative of 'transfiguration' for Moses and therefore for those who sought the truth through the Hebrew tradition.

Again, it is not a recorded event, even though a majority of the faithful are still locked in to an earlier primitive literal reading of the story.

Exodus 24: 12-18 tells of Moses receiving the ten commandments, it is a creation story just as the earlier book of Genesis provided a creation story.

It is not a recorded account of creation, but rather invites us into 'a new creation', a movement from existence into life.

Recorded accounts of history and scientific analysis provide us with descriptions of actual observable existence. The Scriptures seek to take us beyond existence and into the reality of eternity; and that is the movement from existing into living, and into life lived in a fullness that reflects the glory of God, the Divine activity of all life.

We can readily see the 'creation narrative' formula in the first reading; it is a six day narrative that comes to completion on the seventh day. And if we read beyond v18, where the lectionary finishes today, we will see that Moses was changed and made visibly different by the whole experience.

The Hebrew tradition read this narrative as a literal account that described Moses as 'no other' and he was therefore set apart as someone special within their faith tradition. Such a primitive interpretation makes the narrative a magical story rather than an icon of mystical revelation; and the same process/distortion was adopted by the early Church in relation to the New Testament Scriptures.

So now looking at the gospel; we read another creation story, the "*six days later*" pointing us toward the seventh day; and again not a creation account of existence, but an invitation into the new creation that takes us into life and living that is beyond existence.

Peter, James and John (key figures in the early church like Moses was in the Hebrew tradition) in lifting themselves to higher places go beyond the everyday. They see in Jesus the same movement that the Hebrew people had encountered in Moses.

This is so much the same 'process' or 'movement' that Jesus, Moses and Elijah are apprehended together, as one.

Peter, James and John saw Jesus in a new light, a new creation, and Jesus reveals to them (and so to us) life lived in a new light.

The narrative continues with a more explicit revelation of God's Word, the very voice of creation, "*suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased"*

It is the very same Divine Word that reveals the ministry of Jesus at his baptism; however there is a short addition; "*listen to him!*"

In this short narrative we have revealed for us our movement through Lent toward Easter.

