

## Sunday 27 February 2022 (Transfiguration Sunday)

### Ex 34: 29-30, 33-35

<sup>29</sup> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. <sup>30</sup> When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>33</sup> When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. <sup>34</sup> But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup> they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

### 2 Cor 3: 12-18

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. <sup>13</sup> We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

### Luke 9: 28-37

<sup>28</sup> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup> As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup> Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. <sup>31</sup> They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup> As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

<sup>34</sup> While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup> A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." <sup>36</sup> When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

<sup>37</sup> The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him.

## **Meditation: Jesus leads us up and down the mountain**

Today is Transfiguration Sunday in the Methodist Church.

But I wonder if you know what 'transfiguration' means? It's a long word, and one that we don't use much in our normal, everyday conversations.

Maybe, if you've read the Harry Potter books, you'll know that Professor McGonagall teaches transfiguration. Here the pupils of Hogwarts learn how to change one object into another, and Professor McGonagall can actually turn herself into a cat.

In the Bible, transfiguration isn't about turning into random objects or animals, but it is about a dramatic and supernatural change in appearance.

There are two special instances of transfiguration in the Bible – it happened to Moses, and it happened to Jesus. Both times it happened at the top of a mountain.

### **Let's take a quick look at what happened to Moses:**

In the book of Exodus we read that Moses led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. When they were in the desert, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, and he would often go to the mountain to speak with God. Whenever Moses was speaking with God, his face became *radiant*, so much so that, when he came back down the mountain, he had to cover his face with a veil so as not to scare the people.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration is a bit different because he wasn't alone. Jesus had friends with him who experienced it all.

### **Let's take a longer look at what happened to Jesus:**

Jesus leads three of his closest friends, Peter, James and John up the mountain.

I wonder how the disciples might have been feeling?

How would you have felt if Jesus invited you to pray with him at the top of a mountain?

Maybe the disciples were worn out from all the travelling and exhausted from dealing with all the crowds who were following Jesus.

I imagine that Peter, James and John felt honoured at having been selected by Jesus to accompany him on this intimate trip. But they were facing an uncomfortable night on a mountain without any camping equipment.

When they eventually reach the top of the mountain, Jesus starts to pray. And, as seems to be a repeating pattern of behaviour, the exhausted disciples fall asleep.

In their sleepy state and in this unusual place, it suddenly dawns on them that strange things are happening! There is a brightness that seems to be coming from Jesus himself. And Jesus is talking with other people – Moses and Elijah no less! It

isn't a dream. They are snapped into full-consciousness, fully awake and wide-eyed. Something spectacular and miraculous was happening! The mountain top was ablaze with the extraordinary. And they were there, they were witnesses! Peter is overwhelmed with excitement, and says the first thing that enters his head.

But the scene is suddenly changed. A thick cloud descends and envelopes them. What was clear is suddenly shrouded in mystery. Vision is obscured. Excitement and enthusiasm quickly turn to fear. And then a voice. It sounds just like the voice that spoke when Jesus was baptised. The voice of God, one more time, audibly and clearly saying: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

As the cloud lifts, the three disciples see only Jesus. It is a clear moment of truth. Their ability to see is restored, and their vision is focussed on the one thing that matters: Jesus. Everything that came before this moment: the law according to Moses, Elijah and the prophets – everything is simplified and focussed on the one thing that is good and enduring: Jesus, the Christ; Jesus, God's son.

They gaze at him. Amazed. In awe. There are no words. Even Peter keeps his mouth shut. Somehow words are not needed. What they just experienced was indescribable. It was real, but also a mystery. A glimpse of the transfigured Jesus. A glimpse of the glory of God. It was a gift, a treasure. And they would need it later in life. They needed to remember this moment, especially when things got difficult.

The next morning, Jesus leads them back down the mountain. Jesus leads them back down to everyday life, back to the other disciples, back to the needs and demands of all the people, back to the work of loving and caring and suffering and learning. But they would never be the same again. *They* had been transformed too. They had experienced a miracle. They *knew* who Jesus was. And they would follow him for the rest of their lives.

**This journey up and down the mountain can be an analogy for our own spiritual lives too.**

At some point, Jesus leads *us* up the mountain.  
Have *you* ever had a 'mountaintop' experience?  
Have *you* ever experienced something so special that you could hardly put it into words?

The apostle Paul wrote about Moses' transfigured appearance and how Moses had to put a veil over his face because it was so radiant. In 2 Corinthians Paul says, "Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (...) And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory..." (2 Cor 3: 16, 18).

So, just like Moses on the mountain with God, when *we* focus on God, our very selves somehow are transformed.

And just like Peter, James and John on the mountain with Jesus, as *we* gaze into the face of Jesus, everything becomes clear. The veil falls away. We can see his glory, and as we focus on him, we are changed.

At some point, Jesus leads us up the mountain.

But he never expects us to stay there on the mountaintop. He doesn't want us to stay there.

Jesus always leads us back down the mountain, back to the messy and difficult everyday life. This is where God's kingdom is coming to life. God is always coming down and growing his kingdom of love down at the bottom of the mountain.

Our spiritual life is *not* about trying to reach a high point, it's *not* about trying to have mountaintop experiences, or trying to get to heaven 'up there'.

Our spiritual life is about sharing God's glory with others, right here in the valley.

Our spiritual life is about discovering that God is here. God is to be discovered here.

God's kingdom is growing here.

Thank God for the mountaintop experiences, because they give us new vision, they give us inspiration and they give us hope. But life is to be lived in the valley. Thank God that Jesus goes with us *down* the mountain too. Amen