

**Bright**

*Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9*

Last week I went to visit the oldest member of our congregation who has just celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. She told me that everyone was telling her it was quite an achievement, which she casually dismissed by saying, "It's not that much of an achievement. All you need to do is to remember to keep breathing for as long as you are able." Well, quite.

I asked her if she were to give a message to the Church what it might be. She paused for a moment and said, "Keep praying. Don't give up - times are tough enough. And remember that God has called you." Well, quite.

I brought home communion to her, and we shared the bread and wine together. And when I finished praying, she said, out loud, a little prayer of her own. She's the kind of person that though I go to visit her as a Minister, I feel she has ministered to me. It is a transformational, transfiguring moment. It shines inside and out. It's bright.

We all know people like that who are a blessing to us and who brighten our lives simply by their being there. The parent who took the time to notice and to listen and to encourage. The friend who stood by us, right or wrong, as a support and strength. The colleague who helped us out when they didn't need to do so. The partner or spouse or child or grandchild who offers that moment of shining unconditional love that is seen in their eyes, or their tone of voice, or the little act of kindness performed that flips our heart and makes our eyes mist over.

The bright people. The people who project *by who they are* a project light into our lives.

When psychologists talk about '*projection*' they talk about a defence mechanism where individuals attribute their own unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or traits to another person or

group, often to avoid confronting those aspects within themselves. This process helps protect the ego from discomfort or anxiety associated with acknowledging these traits directly.

But what if, rather than this kind of negative projection, to hide or distract or wrong-foot, the individual was to project positively? Projecting kindness, tolerance, generosity, laughter, graciousness, love. Projecting bright into the darkling world.

The Moses story in Exodus and the Transfiguration story in Matthew reflect each other. They are two lights shining in the darkness. They unveil a light that draws people towards God. They show a touching place where the light of God transfigures and transforms not only the outward appearance, but speak of the spiritual, internal transformation that the coming of light has on everything it touches. To accept into your life the light of God is to attempt to take on board letting the light of your life shine in your world. When people around us look at us, the light of faith and hope and love should be visible, and audible, and even touchable. Like God's light, our light is meant to touch the world and change it, just as we are changed, transfigured, transformed by the light.

For those of us of a generation that was brought up with the children's religious song, "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam", we might be concerned that for some of the time at least we are barely a fitful sparkler, let alone a sunbeam projecting the light of God's love into the world.

Nevertheless with Moses and Jesus we are encouraged to see that God can and does work through earthly bodies to bring light, to shine, to be bright. On the mountain top of Sinai, or the Mount of the Transfiguration, often assumed to be Mount Tabor, in the Jezreel Valley about 11 miles east of the Sea of Galilee, humanity and divinity mingle. And even if only for the brief moment, the hem of eternity is drawn aside and we catch a glimpse of what it will mean to be united with God in the Kingdom of Light.

It is a decisive moment for Moses, encountering God face to face. It is a decisive revelation about Jesus, as His disciples see not only Who Jesus is, but hear that He is God's beloved Son with Whom God is well pleased, and to Whom we should listen. In the high places holiness is revealed. The resurrection faces of God's people then and now shine like the sun.

Realistic? Far-fetched? Highly unlikely? I saw it last week in the face of a centenarian. I saw another it in the face of a young person invited to read a prayer at the beginning of one of our services. I saw it in the face of a mother listening to her son sing in the choir. I saw it in the face of an old man being praised for his painting at Morningside Hope's Heart for Art. I saw it in the faces of a young couple preparing for their wedding as the reality of their love and what they would be promising to each other felt real.

Bright. Transfiguration light. And whether or not it was for them an experience of Christian spirituality, yet nevertheless they shone and reflected to those with eyes to see at least a glimpse of what God in humanity might look like.

We don't have to look far to find the darkness in the world, in the news, even in the mirror when we scan our reflections. But do we ever look for the light? Do we ever find ourselves surprised by the Christ-light shining in a person, or a place, or a situation where we had not anticipated it, yet there it was, nonetheless. Like the sun breaking through a cloud-scudded sky. Momentary, fleeting, but transforming and transfiguring.

Peter, James and John wanted to capture the moment on the mountain. Build little houses for the shining figures to keep them, preserve them, control them. But it was not to be.

Overwhelmed by the bright they fall to the ground, only to be touched and lifted up by Jesus. Telling them to get up, and not to be afraid, and to take their experience of the light in their

memories as they travel down the mountain and back into the workaday world, where the light, even in memory, will make a difference.

Our lives are not lived on mountaintops, but on the flatlands of laundry and food shopping and tax returns and exams. But there will be times when we are startled by the mystical in the midst of the mundane, the awesome amid the ordinary, the breathtaking amid the boring.

My ministry amongst you is conducted amid ordinary lives. Much of my time is occupied with maintaining at least some semblance of order in the congregation's life and worship. Sermons are written between discussions about church heating, or the work priorities of the church administrator, or the number of Christmas trees we might have at the next Christmas tree festival (yes, that was a meeting last Thursday night).

Yet in the midst of the relentless routines of ministry, '*sometimes light surprises*', and we find ourselves startled by parables of the transforming glory of God - an elusive glory that cannot be programmed or administered, only received with awe and wonder and smiling surprise. We catch glimpses of glory that can break forth when we least expect it, with the power to transfigure and transform an otherwise quite ordinary event into an epiphany, a revelation of the presence of God in our world.

Over the past weeks I know some of you have had struggles and pain and disappointment and shock to contend with. A future that seemed certain suddenly upset and thrown into doubt by the casual decision of someone else. A bereavement out of the blue. A health condition that changed your life overnight. A situation at work, or here in Church, that has caused you to doubt the actions of another person. Someone or something that has let you down, badly. Or maybe you have become aware that you are the one who has caused the problem or been the difficulty. We feel discouraged, or embarrassed, or guiltily defiant, or wrestle with, 'what was I thinking?'

Then in some remarkable way forgiveness is offered, a corner turned, a roadblock removed, darkness lifted, and God's shining presence came near. No logical explanation. It simply flashed into our life. That is, I believe, a signal that a new day is on the way, and that God has not done with us yet.

God is about the business of bringing hope and healing to a broken world, and brightness will come. We may not be able to explain the mechanics of transfiguration. But we can tell stories about when light came, and made a difference, and changed things, and changed us.

Shine. Jesus is coming to make all things new. Even you.

Be bright.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**

---

*<sup>i</sup> William Cowper hymn*