

Friday 5th August, 2016
Ecumenical Eucharist on the Feast of the Transfiguration
Daniel 7:9-10,13-14
Psalm 96:1-2,5-6,9
2 Peter 1:16-19
Luke 9:28-36

In the name of God; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-giver. Amen.

“and behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.”
(Lk.9:30-31)

There are times when I am especially glad that the inspiration of God was such that it led people to interpret in different ways the same original document on which the Gospels were written. Now of course there are times when I might *not* appreciate it, also, when different translations and versions might be confusing, if not almost contradictory in the way they render the original version. But here, tonight, I am saying a prayer of thanks to the person or people who gave us the Jerusalem Bible.

Why? Well perhaps those of you who regularly worship here at St. Joseph’s may not have batted an eyelid, but I know that I (who regularly use the NRSV translation, rather than that of the Jerusalem Bible we heard tonight) - I was certainly struck by this particular phrase in the Gospel “...and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” The exodus...

It made me reach very quickly for my New Revised Standard Version, just to make sure I hadn’t been missing something all of these years. And no, I hadn’t, for my trusty NRSV says this: “They appeared in glory and were speaking of his *departure*, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

It’s only one word that varies. Departure or exodus. But what a difference one word makes. To me, it changes the whole thrust of what is being described here, up on the mountain - and I’m not sure that I can ever simply use the word *departure* ever again.

From this point in Luke's Gospel, as he and his disciples come down from the mountain, Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem - to his coming trial and suffering, and ultimately to the cross. But here on the mountain-top, with his disciples as witnesses, and in the presence of the two great figures of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus describes what it is he will achieve through the cross - it is to be nothing less than an *exodus*.

What is this exodus about, then? We know well the story of the original exodus, don't we - we remember it when we commemorate our Easter celebrations, as we retell the story of liberation and freedom of the Hebrew people from the tyranny of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This original exodus began the journey of God's chosen people to the promised land, and displayed powerfully God's love and care for God's people.

But never before had I quite thought of the events of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection in quite such a similarly explicit way. For those events of the cross are surely for us, an exodus - a freedom from the tyranny of that which binds us, and holds us back from being the people who we were created to be. Our own exodus and release, wrought by the power of Jesus' death and resurrection displays for *us* the power of God's love and care for us, as we begin our journey back to our Creator.

And this... this is what Jesus speaks of here on the mountain - the exodus, that journey which must go by the way of the cross, in order to gain our freedom.

So if we share with Jesus in this freedom, then it follows, I think, that we also share with him in his glory, his divinity, his "God-ness", just as he shares with us our humanity, our being of the earth. So, although this feast is primarily a revelation about Jesus, confirming his divinity, authority and glory, the challenge and the shock is... it's also a revelation about *us*... and who we are called to be!

That shining, transformed, beautiful person on the mountain is who God invites us to be. What we see in Jesus is a promise of the possibility of who we, through God's grace, can become.

God is guaranteeing to take the sobering reality of our present truth, our present condition, and transform it into glory. When we look at the transformed Jesus we see who God is offering to make us... who we can be.... because this shining beauty is who God created us to be... and despite our failure, remains our true essence. The image of God remains intact within us... waiting to be brought forth. Waiting to be freed, by the exodus that Jesus promises he will fulfil.

The brilliant local Jesuit theologian, Brendan Byrne, says this about the feast we celebrate tonight: “We will sometimes be with Jesus on the mountain, mostly on the plain; but whatever we feel at any particular moment, we will never be truly far from the One who is the source of our life and our hope.”

At the end of it all, the Transfiguration, then, is not about the remoteness of God; not about the distance which exists between God and us. Rather, despite its almost supernatural overtones it is about the *closeness*; the imminence of God. And it is about a promise - an eternal promise, that through the exodus of Jesus' death and resurrection, we may be transformed.

This journey of transformation takes us by the way of the cross. Those who would realise their potential and achieve their destiny with the transfigured and risen Christ, must also walk with him the way of the cross. For only there, only as we are put to death with him, will the powers of death lose their hold over us, and leave us free to be raised with Christ, that we might with him shine, transfigured, with the blazing glory of God.

(Let us pray). Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us in your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share our human nature, so we may be partakers in his divine glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.