



A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells Cathedral, preached on Sunday 15 February by the Reverend Mary Lewis, Priest Vicar.

'Tis good Lord to be here!

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Thy glory fills the night;

Thy face and garments, like the sun,

Shine with unborrowed light." (New English Hymnal 138)

Today, we are invited in our imaginations to ascend two mountains. First to imagine Moses and Joshua ascending Mount Sinai and then to be with Jesus as he is transfigured on Mount Tabor in the presence of Moses, Elijah and the disciples Peter, James and John. Being on top of a mountain is exhilarating; the fresh air, the view, the sense of being 'on the top of the world'. But neither Moses nor Jesus went up a mountain for the view or fresh air or even for exercise as we might, but rather to meet with God.

Ancient texts connect the appearance of God with Mount Sinai (Judges 5.5) and the cloud shrouding the peaks offered a vivid symbol of the awe-inspiring mystery of God's presence. So Moses ascends Mount Sinai and after six days God calls out to him from inside the cloud and invites him right into the cloud, into the very presence of God. This meeting of Moses with God follows immediately on the sealing of the covenant between God and Israel. It confirms Moses as the one who was so close to God, that he could hear his voice and write down the law.

The description of the transfiguration of Jesus has several echoes of the story of Moses' meeting with God. After Peter has made his confession that Jesus is the Messiah, a similar period of six days passes before Jesus leads his three closest disciples up Mount Tabor.

And when he is transfigured, the description 'his face shone like the sun' inevitably recalls Moses' shining face after his meeting with God. A cloud also covers the vision on the mountain and out of the cloud Jesus hears God's voice, "*This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased*". And the presence of Moses, on both mountain tops, links the first exodus out of Egypt, that Moses led, with the account of the Transfiguration in Luke's Gospel where Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus of the new Exodus that he is to accomplish. That new

Exodus is Jesus' death by which he will lead all humanity out of the bondage of sin and death.

The official Feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated on 6 August but in reflecting on the pattern of Jesus' life, it is good to remember the Transfiguration at this time as well. For not only are we about to enter Lent, but the bewildered disciples, now sure of Jesus' identity, know that they must follow him into a situation which is beyond their understanding. And Jesus is assured, that the road ahead that will lead to his passion, is his Father's will.

The vision of glory did not last and soon they were on their way down the mountain, to be confronted with a very earthly problem, a boy with severe epilepsy whose father was desperate for help.

All of us share in the sense that the events of our lives are part of a tapestry which is woven with the joys and sorrows of life. While we are alive, we see only the rough workings of the underside of the tapestry. One day, we will see the finished pattern on the upper side.

The poem called 'Life's Weaving', explores how our lives are woven with many colours with the help of the Lord.

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colours
He worketh steadily.
Oft times he weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride,
forget he sees the upper,
And I the underside.
Not 'til the loom is silent
and the shuttles cease to fly,
shall God unroll the canvas
and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
in the Weaver's skilful hand
as the threads of gold and silver
in the pattern he has planned.
He knows, he loves, he cares
nothing this truth can dim
he gives his very best to those
who leave the choice to him.

Woven into the tapestry of our lives, as into all lives, are disappointments, times of distressing loss and heart break, as well as times of joy, celebration and fulfilment. We know the underside of the tapestry well, the rough knots, the broken threads, the chaos, but what does the upper side look like? There is an answer from St Paul, which links in with the light of the Transfiguration and the Collect of today, when he says in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." (1Cor 3.18)

And what does the tapestry of Jesus' life look like woven as it is with the most sombre colours of crucifixion and the most glorious colours of Resurrection. The wounds of the cross will never leave Jesus for he continues to be close to all who suffer. But the divine light, the 'unborrowed light' as the hymn declares, that shines from Jesus at the Transfiguration suggests a tapestry of unsurpassed beauty. And we may have a great surprise, when the time comes to see the upper side of our tapestry, which is not only being gradually transformed but woven into the life of Jesus, for as St Paul said it is "*in him we live and move and have our being*". (Acts 17.28)

The service we offer to God in whatever way is appropriate is the most precious thing we can give but whatever our situation it is possible to seek moments of 'transfiguration', moments that lift our spirits through prayer, a retreat, a gathering of family or friends or through the joy of the natural world.

For it is always possible to go deeper, and to get closer to the light of Christ which is love. The 7th century Abbot of St Catherine's of Mount Sinai, Saint Anastasius, wrote in a sermon for the Transfiguration, "Let us listen to the voice of God which summons us from the mountain top. There we must hasten like Jesus who is our leader and has gone before us into heaven. There, with him, may the eyes of our mind shine with his light and the features of our soul be made new; may we be transfigured with him and moulded to his image, ever becoming divine, being transformed in an ever-greater degree of glory. Here with Christ are the countless treasures of eternal blessings; here are the beginnings of the age to come." Amen.

The Reverend Mary Lewis

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