

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Sunday 17th March 2019

Brightons Parish Church

Last week we kicked off the season of Lent and began our journey towards Easter. We mused over the issue of how we as a congregation might be more than simply busy – that we might be a people who participate in the continuing ministry of Jesus in such a way that it truly changes lives. **We saw that key to** this was for each of us to know Jesus, to know Him, for ourselves, as a real person, as the Lord who is truly risen, and whose voice calls out to us even now.

And so, we pondered the heart of Jesus last week, and we saw in Him a heart captivated by Father God, through the words of Father God...

The outworking of that for us was to create space this Lent for the words of the Father to shape our hearts like they shaped the heart of Jesus, that we may then also know the abundant life of Jesus and be in better shape to participate in His continuing ministry.

That may have seemed a bit academic to you, a bit removed from everyday life, but let me share with you an email I got from a friend this week. It's from an older friend, a retired missionary now living in Edinburgh, who is somewhere in his 80s and largely housebound. His wife passed away last year, but my friend continues to invest himself in prayer and in sharing the Good News of Jesus with neighbours and friends. So, I usually ask him every few months how it's going reaching out to these folks. Last week he shared some **exciting news, he wrote:**

“Our neighbour has been reading John's Gospel with me and at about chapter 6 he looked me in the eye and said, “I want what you've got”. He followed me in a prayer of repentance and asking for the life of the Holy Spirit, since when, he has been diligently attending church with me; he loves the Word and regrets seventy wasted years.”

“I want what you’ve got.” Incredible words. But no one is going to ask what we’ve got, if we don’t actually have it. My friend shines with the light of Jesus, and he does so because he knows Jesus and is in a dynamic, authentic relationship with Jesus. Coming back to today’s passage, let me ask you – when did you last have a transfiguration-like moment with Jesus? When did you last have a transfiguration-like moment with Jesus? **Or let me put it another way – when was the last time Jesus did something that expanded your box?**

Remember this box we talked about 7 weeks ago, with all the labels referring to Jesus? When was the last time Jesus did something outside of your box? Maybe something new, something you needed, something that gave you life. Because in those moments, in those transfiguration moments, something happens – the divine invades the ordinary, light invades darkness, the unexplainable invades what is known.

And when that happens, we're captivated afresh by Jesus, and consequently captivated afresh by the Father and it can bring peace and joy; it can bring purpose and direction; it can also startle or excite; but what it cannot do is leave you bored or ambivalent about Jesus.

Friends, we should be able to say when we last had a transfiguration-like moment with Jesus? You should be able to tell me when He last expanded your box, or why you are excited about Him? Now those moments, don't need to involve bright lights and heavenly clouds like the transfiguration event itself, it doesn't need to look as psychedelic as the picture on the screen, which is one artist's interpretation of the event – but there should be moments when Jesus captures your attention afresh, and stirs up some of the emotions that the disciples felt that day, like wonder and awe, or speechlessness, even a little holy fear.

So, when did Jesus last do something like that, for you? Again, this can seem a bit vague, so I'd like to give you some of my more recent examples, to help ground this idea.

The week after I was inducted here, I went away on a one-day, silent retreat at The Beild Centre in Perthshire. We were given a number of suggestions of how to use the time and it was recommended that we spend the first hour out in the grounds of the estate. It was a lovely sunny, frosty morning and as I wandered around the grounds, I tried to be attentive to what I saw and what God, by His Spirit, might say to me through His creation. This isn't something I find easy but in those moments of attentiveness and quietness, I believe God spoke to me about His creativity and His protection and sustaining power, and all whilst I spent an hour walking the grounds. And in those moments of awareness I felt more alive, and I felt hope, and I became more captivated by my Saviour and my God.

Or just before Christmas, I visited a couple our age we had got to know up in Kirkhill, and my friend, the husband here, was sitting in a chair, racked with pain in his neck – I think he had pulled a muscle of something with his teenage sons. He'd tried all the usual things, heat pads, pain killers, a tens machine, but with little effect. And I felt a nudge in my spirit that I should pray for him, pray for healing. So, we did, a little short prayer – and then I asked him, how you doing, can you test it out, any improvement? And my friend was able to stand up, without flinching now – he wasn't 100% better, and despite praying again, that didn't change. But before the first prayer, he could not get out that chair or turn his neck without pain, and then after the prayer, things were different.

A final few, quick examples.

You probably know by now that I love to read, and you've probably seen that I love to worship exuberantly – though you haven't seen me dance yet, and we might get to that – but I read and I love to worship. And when I engage in these activities, my mind is stirred with new insights about Jesus and what it means to follow Him, and my heart and my body are thrilled in enthusiastic adoration of God.

But whether through a walk in creation, or in a prayer for healing, or from something I've read or sang, those have been my recent transfiguration-like moments, the moments when Jesus has expanded my box, has captivated me afresh and infused me with new life and excitement about Him.

But you know, we each can have such moments – it's not just for me, the minister – this is the gift, the right, of every child of God. Yet, I suspect that many of us struggle to name the last time we felt that way or had such a moment. And that could be because, no one has told us how. Or if they have, they've only told us in the way that fits them, for we're all different, and different things will work for each of us. So, I'd like to share something with you that I shared with the folks at Breathing In yesterday.

Across the centuries, it has been recognised within Scripture and Christian tradition, that how we connect with Jesus, how we relate to Him, varies from person to person. There are core spiritual practices, or disciplines, that are crucial for any Christian and these include reading the Bible; prayer; serving the Lord; and spending time in adoration of Jesus.

But how we do this will differ from one to another. Most recently this was written about by Gary Thomas in his book, “Sacred Pathways”. There he describes the wonderful variety of ways in which we relate to God, with each way being equally acceptable to God. Thomas comes up with 9 broad temperaments, which are:

- **Naturalists**: whose hearts open up to God when they get outdoors. God seems more real to them when they're out for a hike or sitting in a peaceful creation. I had a bit of that quite recently.
- **Intellectuals**: they really like books and ideas. They want to come out of their devotional time with new understanding. If their mind isn't engaged, their heart feels cold. Again, that's me.
- **Sensates** are more aesthetically inclined. These are the artistic types, and they prefer creative and original music or even good architecture to open their hearts to

God's presence. Their worship is about seeing, hearing, feeling, even tasting God's presence.

- **Traditionalists** find great meaning by worshiping God according to set patterns — whether their own or historical ones. They may have scheduled times of prayer or choose to observe the Christian calendar or use liturgy and Christian symbols to express their worship.

- **Ascetics** meet God internally. They prefer to shut out the world and meet God in solitude and austerity. For ascetics, the best environment for personal worship is a quiet place with an orderly environment, and they usually don't like the distractions of group worship. They can be advocates of all-night prayer vigils or the classical disciplines, such as fasting and meditation.

- **Activists** meet God in the vortex of confrontation. They want to fight God's battles because God becomes

most real to them when they are standing up for justice or working on the frontlines to build God's kingdom.

- **Caregivers** love God by loving others. Providing care or meeting needs in the name of Jesus spiritually energizes caregivers and draws them closer to the Lord.

- **Enthusiasts** like the excitement and celebration of group worship and probably buy more praise music than books. They feed off the enthusiasm of other believers and typically revel in God's mystery and supernatural power. They also enjoy creative forms of worship. Again, that's probably me.

- Finally, **Contemplatives** are marked by an emotional attachment and surrender to God. They are God's lovers, and they want to spend their time in God's presence — adoring Him, listening to Him, enjoying Him. They often find benefit in journal writing, where they can explore their heart's devotion.

I wonder which ones you might be? Usually we each are a mix of temperaments, though in children, especially young children, they tend to have one dominant type. And it's usually this mix of temperaments that creates frustration about worship styles on a Sunday.

If you would like to find out which type you might be, you can actually do a quiz, I did that yesterday with the folks at Breathing In, and I think they found that helpful. Later today we'll put the quiz on the church website, but if you would prefer a photocopied version then you can collect one today from the communion table.

But remember this - it's not enough simply to take the quiz, you need to lean in to these temperaments and create the space, amongst all the busyness, to meet with Jesus.

You will not have a transfiguration-like moment every time you seek to spend time with Jesus – the disciples certainly didn't – but they had lots of moments, where in other ways, in gentle quiet ways, Jesus still expanded the box, inch by inch. So maybe this Lent, you need to learn your spiritual temperament, and lean into it, such that you meet with Jesus afresh and by His Word and by prayer, through service and adoration, but according to your temperament, the box you have Jesus in begins to expand, and then maybe you too will know the life that my friend knows, and you'll hear people say to you, "I want what you've got", and you can introduce them to Jesus.

In the event of the transfiguration, Jesus expanded the box of the disciples, and I'd like to conclude with a few thoughts on that.

The transfiguration event is laden with imagery and echoes of the Old Testament. Jesus ascends the mountain and has a divine moment, just like Moses ascended the mountain and met with God. Jesus is enveloped in a cloud, with the disciples outside witnessing, just like Moses was enveloped by a cloud too, with the leaders of Israel outside bearing witness.

But on the occasion that Moses was on the mountain, God said, “I am Yahweh, the Lord Almighty” and then God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. In the transfiguration event, God introduces, not Himself, but His Son: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.” This means that to listen to Jesus, is to listen to God Himself; the words of Jesus, are the words of God. Jesus is not another Moses or prophet like Elijah;

He is not just some other religious teacher, He is God in the flesh, and the box of the disciples is truly being expanded.

But what is equally striking here for the disciples, is that the transfiguration event comes straight after **Jesus says in v22, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’ In the transfiguration event itself, Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his ‘departure’, in the Greek, the word is ‘exodos’, a play on the word, ‘exodus’, referring back to Israel being saved from captivity.**

This all goes to show how central the death of Jesus is to His mission. But this is brand new to the disciples – never in a million years would they have put on their box...

that Jesus would die, that the promised Messiah would die – such an idea was startling and even scandalous! But in the view of Jesus, and in the view of his heavenly Father, the death of Jesus is crucial and glorious. When the Father says, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.” – Father God is confirming that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, not in spite of the suffering that is to come rather because of it.

Here in the transfiguration event, the Father wants to give the disciples see that the one who is glorious in His being will descend to the depth of disgrace; that He who is divinely dressed on the mountaintop will on the cross have his garments taken from him; that He who is superior to all other mortals and crowned Son of God, will on the cross die a humiliating death for the sake of all humanity.

One commentator writes, “The one who is transfigured on the mountain is the one who is disfigured by anguish, pain and death on the cross. The two cannot be separated.” This Jesus is God’s Son, who has been chosen for this new exodus to lead others out of an even greater darkness into the glorious light of the kingdom of the Son.

Friends, this is the Jesus we can all come to know in a deeper way. He wants to lead you into a life-giving relationship with Himself; He wants to expand the box you have Him in; and He wants to be so at work in your heart and life that others will say, “I want what you have” and you can then point them to Jesus.

Friends, this Lent, lean in to your spiritual temperament, and come to know more of the Jesus who is both crucified and glorious. May it be so. Amen.