

The Transfiguration, Eucharist

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14, 2 Peter 1: 16-19, Luke 9: 28-36

Mother Alice

Apocalyptic writings remind us of the scale of God's glory.

I wonder where you go to pray. Is spending time with God something you do everyday, in the same place, at the same time? Is prayer something that happens on the go, at different times and in different places? Are there places that you can't go to often, but that are your spiritual home, your 'thin places' where God feels very near, and where it is easier to pray? At Sunday on Monday this week we were talking afterwards over lunch about Christian summer conferences – Focus, New Wine, On Fire Mission, Walsingham, Taize, Greenbelt, Spring Harvest – there are so many to choose from. For many Christians, myself included, having a week or two intentionally surrounded by other Christians, with opportunities for Bible study, worship, fellowship, prayer ministry, talks and seminars about spirituality, ethics, education, mission and all kinds of other things, is a high point in the year. It is a time of filling the tank spiritually, being nourished, being inspired and encouraged in faith and always, a profound time of prayer and deep encounter with God.

I'm interested in how and where Jesus goes to pray. We see him going to the Temple to pray as a child and young man. We see him going out to quiet places away from the crowds. We see him going up mountains to pray, like in today's reading. Always with Jesus, there is a clear sense of intentionality – of him going to pray, deciding to do this, to prioritise this, being purposeful and clear with those around him. It's not that Jesus doesn't pray at other times, but his life does seem to be punctuated by these deliberate times of prayer in special places. We see both the everyday, ordinary prayer, like the Lord's Prayer that he teaches his disciples, and then also the extraordinary and profound encounters with God the Father, these 'apocalyptic' unveilings of the God where the heavens physically split open and the glory and majesty of God is revealed. For those around Jesus, these kind of encounters are truly terrifying, but for Jesus they seem to be really significant markers in his life and ministry, moments of revelation which affirm and proclaim his divine Sonship, and earthly mission.

I want to suggest that we need the same. For our spiritual lives to grow we need these moments of profound affirmation – where we too can hear the voice of the Father calling us his beloved children. We need these moments of encounter which bring fire into our hearts – so that we can burn brightly as lights in the world to the glory of God the Father. We need these mountain top moments, not necessarily at the top of mountains, but in wherever we feel the presence of God most clearly. I really do want to encourage you to be a bit of a spiritual thrill seeker – to not be afraid of the power of God, but to eagerly desire it, being open to expecting the unexpected, of hearing God's voice, of being in awe of the majesty of God. Because I think without this, our faith becomes lukewarm. We become forgetful of all that God has done for us. Our flames begin to subside and our hearts begin to smoulder instead of being set on fire with love. I want to encourage you not to be afraid – afraid of God's power, and afraid of what might happen to you. I love that expression 'let go and let God' – because when we intentionally seek God, then we know that the door will be opened to us. God always shows up, he always unveils himself.

Daniel's encounter might feel quite uncomfortable to us. Indeed most of this genre of writing in Scripture – the 'apocalyptic' writings like Daniel and Revelation, have quite a strange feeling to

them. What is being described is truly other worldly, God is indescribable and uncontrollable. I think it's why we can shy away from these kind of books of the Bible – they are too difficult, they unveil something of God which we cannot make sense of or grasp. But this is precisely why they really matter. Daniel's visions and dreams articulate in dramatic poetry and vivid visual description something which we simply will never encounter if we remain in a sort of everyday spirituality, something where God remains in our comfort zone. We mustn't see Daniel and those who are given these spiritual gifts of prophecy and revelation as plain lunatics, mad and misguided. These are the giants of faith whose desire to seek God is honoured as God reveals Himself to them. And this vision of the Son of Man endured through the centuries as a vision of the coming Messiah, the one whose kingdom will never fail and be destroyed. Prophecies and spiritual gifts are necessary because they unveil the power and majesty of God, they bring hope and healing, they inspire unity and commitment. And they bring a sense of true awe, lifting our eyes above the everyday, just for a moment into those heavenly realms.

In our Gospel reading love the way the disciples respond to Jesus' encounter with God up the mountain, what we call the 'Transfiguration', because they don't yet understand, and yet that desire to put up some tents, seems to me to indicate a desire to stay in that place, to be in God's presence, even though it is terrifying. There is something very, very good about being there. They're totally exhausted from the climb, and can barely stay awake, and yet they are desperate to see, hear and understand. And this intention, again, is honoured. God reveals himself to them – not in ways that are comfortable or comprehensible, but in a way which in time will serve to help them understand Jesus, and his ultimate journey to the Cross.

On my desk I have words from Psalm 121 – I lift my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. We chose this as one of the readings at our marriage as a reminder of the faithfulness of God, and as a nod to our northern roots, where both of us grew up close to moors and mountains. For me personally it is a reminder that God does often reveal himself in these high places, and that these mountain top revelations have immense spiritual value, because they open to us the whole cosmic order in it's full and glorious magnitude. We are tiny in this vast picture, and yet these glimpses of God's majesty are sufficient to remind us that we matter, that we are known and loved intimately, that the bigger picture is of God's kingdom, of the flourishing of all creation, of the call of God to his children to return and receive mercy. I don't think we should be scared of these encounters, I think we should make the space intentionally, whether in our internal inner rooms, or physically up mountains, to seek God, to seek more of God, and to allow ourselves too to be affirmed and transformed, as Jesus was, in his presence.

Amen