

Sunday before Lent, Eucharist
2 Kings 2: 1-12 and Mark 9: 2-9.
Fr Tim Carroll

One of the reason the church looks to the transfiguration at this time of the year is to recognise its close relationship in the journey Jesus is about to embark on toward Jerusalem and the cross. This passage marks a transition in the narrative of Mark's gospel.

Last week I was on a clergy retreat for those who have just begun jobs in the diocese of London. Those who are going through the transition of new church, new congregation, and new ways of doing ministry in a new part of London. As we arrived at the retreat house in Warwickshire it seemed appropriate that the first things I noticed was the first flowers of spring beginning to emerge. Although I would say for me personally winter hasn't been particularly difficult, that will not be the case for some within our community, who either have difficulty affording gas bills, or those who use our building for warmth as they currently do not have shelter. Signs of spring appearing can be quite literally signs of hope for less difficult days.

The idea of transition is important as a faith community as we begin our Lenten journey through the wilderness to death and resurrection. As we approach Lent we hear Jesus taking a few friends committed to the journey away from the hard ground of urban noise, poverty and the at times doubt and confusion to the mountain top – a sort of retreat in itself. In Mark's gospel this retreat happens after a pretty bruising encounter between Peter and Jesus where Jesus has rebuked Peter over issues surrounding his identity and what it means to follow God's plan. Peter like so many, has internalised and been ground down by the brutality of the empire he is inhabiting, he longs for a God inspired hero to come and do away with the Romans. So he cannot fathom that while the way of Jesus involves a confrontation with oppression, it is not one that inflicts violence and suffering, but instead one that absorbs, one that is vulnerable, one that takes on suffering on behalf of others. Jesus rebuke of Peter seems brutal – *get behind me Satan*.

You can imagine this encounter has been difficult and has lingered with Peter. Jesus has probably thought that a change of scene is required. To clear some space, reenergise on who God is. To hear who God is. A retreat is needed.

I must admit that I didn't hear any audible voices or encounter any cosmic visions like the transfiguration last week, but even a change of pace and an opportunity to pray and be inspired by others, has been a gift as I begin to think about our journey into lent as a community

I recognise the privilege I have a member of clergy to go off for 5 days to a retreat house, not all can give the time to such things. I recently spoke with a regular member of our community who told me of the stress his life and the stress of living in the city. He told me of his love of walking in our local parks and also of visiting this church as a place to encounter peace in the turbulence in our busy city. He helped me realise the value of this space, and of our local green spaces, as places where a change of pace can be found and a fresh focus can be found for knowing who God is and who he is not.

We wish to be outward facing as a congregation but also to value the peace and warmth and encounter that can be found here in this space. For Peter the retreat to the mountain and witnessing the transfiguration forces him out of his illusions of control where he is overwhelmed by the supremacy of Gods power and presence. It will lead him from a place of misunderstanding to become a bold witness to that very power and presence.

Maybe you're not willing or able to get up a mountain top, or take 5 days away for a retreat, but all of us can experience the hope of spring, the emergence of new life and light after a time of darkness. We can interweave our earthy experience with the seasonal shift of our journey into lent. How we connect with nature and the changing of the season can help us focus on the new life that comes through the journey of lent.

Revelation does not only happen on mountain tops – perhaps it can be here in and around this building, as we see leaves and flowers emerging in in our yard and garden, perhaps in the parks nearby or with a walk by the river, maybe it's coming into this building for 10 mins during the week as many others do. Whatever it is, whatever works for you, these can be places of sacred encounter as we prepare our hearts to journey into lent. We can use these moments and locations to lead away from the stresses, the strain, the confusions and to examine what we have internalised, like Peter, which hinder our perceptions of a supreme God who loves us. May we be moved into a clear space where God can speak to us in creation, where like Peter, James and John, and we apprehend the divine presence and hear the divine voice proclaim *"This is my son, the Beloved. Listen to him!"*