

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH

GRAFHAM

Sunday next before Lent

14th February 2021

(Quinquagesima)

Our service this Sunday at 10.45am is

Holy Communion according to the Book of Common Prayer.

The order of service has been circulated previously and is also available on our website standrewsgrafham.org.uk

Opening Hymn

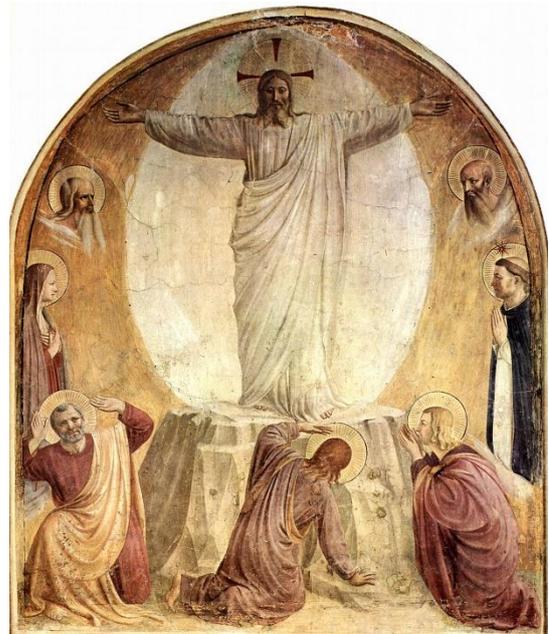
'Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Thy glory fills the night;
thy face and garments, like the sun,
shine with unborrowed light.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here,
thy beauty to behold
where Moses and Elijah stand,
thy messengers of old.

Fulfiller of the past,
promise of things to be,
we hail thy body glorified
and our redemption see.

Before we taste of death,
we see thy kingdom come;
we fain would hold the vision bright,
and make this hill our home.

'Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Yet we may not remain;
but since thou bidst us leave the mount,
come with us to the plain.



The Transfiguration by Fra Angelico

J. Armitage Robinson (1858 -1933)

Collect

Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;

who liveth and reigneth with thee,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First lesson: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Second lesson: Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection

This is a quite extraordinary moment. It's certainly the most unsubtle of all the epiphany moments – those moments of revealing who Jesus is – that we've heard about in our readings since Christmas. No wonder that so many of the paintings of this scene depict the disciples falling over backwards in amazement, in shock and in terror. In the Transfiguration, this moment on the mountain top, Christ's glory is revealed in all its dazzling radiance. I love the way St Mark tells us that no one on earth could make the clothes that white. Yet the Transfiguration does more than reveal Christ's glory. It shows us that the boundaries between heaven and earth have been breached and what that means for us. In the Incarnation, God in Jesus enters our world and shares the human condition. In the Transfiguration, humanity shares in the divine glory. The earthly Jesus in his transfiguration is revealed as opening up a new way of being and a new relationship with God for us all. Here we are given a preview of what is to come – of the light shining in the darkness, overcoming it and making all things new.

Yet this new life doesn't come without cost. The glimpse of glory which we are given is a pre-Easter revelation of the post-Easter reality. It can only be reached through the cross. Many of the great artists have recognised this, as Fra Angelico does in his painting of the Transfiguration in St Mark's Monastery in Florence. There he shows Jesus wearing a cruciform halo and with his arms outstretched as on the cross. (There's a picture beside our opening hymn.) When Jesus comes down from the mountain, he begins his journey towards Jerusalem and his death. Archbishop Michael Ramsey wrote, 'the Transfiguration stands as a gateway to the saving events of the

gospel.’ Although Jesus has revealed his divine nature, he doesn’t slip away to heaven but, as it were, gets on with the job. He embraces humanity in all its brokenness and suffering. In his suffering, he shows us that whatever happens God has been there too, that he is with us always, in all things.

For the disciples this is a turning point or perhaps a threshold to be crossed. They have been following Jesus for three years by now. They probably thought that they knew him well as a teacher, a healer and as a companion. Suddenly everything has changed – what are they to make of this? I imagine that it was reasonably easy to go up the mountain; much less so to come down. We frequently hesitate on thresholds. Although we often interpret Peter’s desire to stay on the mountain as an attempt to hold to the moment of wonder, it might also express his uncertainty or even reluctance to engage with what comes next. Yet the disciples do follow Jesus back to the plain, as our opening hymn said. And they go with God’s words ringing in their ears, ‘listen to him’.

I wonder what all this means for us. St Paul tells us that in Jesus we too can see God’s glory and receive good news that he brings for the whole world. However, sadly not everybody does. In our first reading Paul talks about the god of this world blinding our minds. We are tempted to put other things first – wealth, power, material comfort, security – and so fail to respond to the good news Jesus brings. Elsewhere Paul talks about the ways that lead to death and those that lead to life. Which will we choose? In our Gospel, God commands the disciples to listen to Jesus. What does this mean? The composer, Igor Stravinsky, said, ‘To listen is an effort, and just to hear is no merit. A duck hears also’. If this is true of music, what does it mean here. The sort of listening we are commanded to do is not passive. It means acting on what has been said. It is not enough to look at Jesus, or even admire him saying he was a good man. We are called, like the disciples, to commit ourselves to him, to follow him down from the mountain and to engage with the world in all its messiness.

The Transfiguration not only tells us about Jesus but also about who we become in him. As we experience God’s light in our lives, we will be transformed by it. In our Collect today we pray not only that we will see God’s glory in Jesus but that we will be ‘changed into his likeness, from glory to glory’. We not only see the image of God in Jesus but we grow to reflect that image to others. As we stand on the threshold of Lent, perhaps now is the time to learn to listen more closely in the hope that we will become more Christlike and live in a way which brings his kingdom closer to its fulfilment

Hymn

Bright the vision that delighted
once the sight of Judah's seer;
sweet the countless tongues united
to entrance the prophet's ear.

Round the Lord in glory seated
cherubim and seraphim
filled his temple, and repeated
each to each the alternate hymn:

'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
earth is with its fulness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

Heaven is still with glory ringing,
earth takes up the angels' cry,
'Holy, holy, holy,' singing,
'Lord of hosts, the Lord most high.'

With his seraph train before him,
with his holy Church below,
thus unite we to adore him,
bid we thus our anthem flow:

'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
earth is with its fulness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

*Sung by St Martin's Voices
Richard Mant (1776-1848)*

Notices

ASH WEDNESDAY 17th February Holy Communion at 6pm

The order of service and the Zoom link will be circulated beforehand.

For many people being marked with the sign of the cross with ashes is an important part of this service. You will be invited to mark yourself or other family members with or without ashes during the service. Traditionally the ash is made from the previous year's palm crosses. Sadly we were not able to distribute these last year but you may still have an older one which you could use if you wish. A single palm cross should be sufficient. You can find instructions for preparing the ash on the internet.

During Lent

There will be a service of Compline each Monday evening at 8pm on Zoom starting on 22nd February. Compline is a gentle and peaceful way to bring the day to a close and prepare for sleep. It will be preceded by a short reflection and time of quiet. The order of service and the Zoom link will be sent out after next Sunday's service.

I will be leading a Quiet Afternoon for Lent on Wednesday 3rd March from 2.00pm until 4.30pm. More details in the newsletter Jill circulated last Thursday.

Please let me know (camillawhite@waitrose.com) if you would like to join the afternoon. I will send out the Zoom link and handout at the beginning of March.

Next Sunday

10.45am Holy Communion (Common Worship)

6.00pm Evensong when our preacher will be Judy Wedderspoon

Prayer for the nation

The prayer suggested for this week in addition to the daily themes:

Loving Father God,
be with us in our distress;
be with our families, friends and neighbours,
our country and our world.
Give health to the sick,
hope to the fearful,
and comfort to mourners.
Give wisdom to our frontline and key workers,
insight to our Government,
and patience to us all.
Overcome disease with the power of your new life,
Through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Please share these mailings with anyone who you think might find them helpful. If they would like to receive them direct they are welcome to email office@standrewsgrafham.org.uk and we will add them to the mailing list.

With love and prayers

Camilla

Contact details:

The Revd Camilla White, Priest in Charge camillawhite@waitrose.com or 01483 892645
Jill Parrott, Parish Administrator office@standrewsgrafham.org.uk

Website: standrewsgrafham.org.uk