



BENEDICTUS
contemplative church

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Transfiguration (Luke 9.28-36)

Love that Shines

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In the back of my mind I remember Moses meeting with God and shining, shining so much that he has to cover his face with a veil before he meets other people. And here they are, Jesus and the disciples going up a hill to pray, and Jesus' face changes, and his clothes becoming dazzling white. He seems to be talking with the ancestors, with Moses and Elijah, representatives of the law and the prophets. Here is a moment in time which captures all time, past present and future, and they saw it, they experienced it, even though they were a bit sleepy. And they wanted to stay there in that amazing moment, of course. Have *you* ever noticed a person shining - with love, with presence- a performer totally in the groove, a preacher, an actor, a child, a lover, someone dying? Here is something inexplicable, light that is within, being made manifest and shining out.

What is this transfiguration, this transformation and what has it got to do with the things of the world? Peter wanted to linger a while, stay with the experience, yet Jesus takes them back down the mountain, back down to the plain, back down to the world with all its squeeze and struggles, and for Jesus, that means the death walk to Jerusalem. He has to suffer and die, before resurrection. Malcolm Guite penned his poem, *Transfiguration*, written for a disciple on Good Friday reflecting back. He writes:

For that one moment, 'in and out of time',
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.

Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.¹

There is something in this, divinity within humanity, this presence, this shining that we only occasionally, if ever glimpse within ourselves and within others.

'There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face.'

That captures it, but, we live in tough times, and maybe all times are tough, but this time feels particularly so. We may be tempted to lose hope, to turn away. The American writer Rebecca Solnit argues that hope is not so much about happiness or confidence, as 'a commitment to search for possibilities.'²

People in dire situations have been able to do that, we think of Bonhoeffer and Etty Hillesum, "we left the camp singing," she says.

We can be tempted to give up, to lose hope. Someone said to me the other day "I've been prayed over so many times and nothing's happened but I still hang in there not expecting too much and, still praying for others". Hope is the opposite of defeatism and despair.

Transfiguration, and Guite's sonnet are about a glimpse of the Christ in all his humanity and glory, a glimpse of the divine which we carry with us into the plain, into our tough times, into our dailyness.

And it's about the connection. We can't really speak about it, we can't really tell anyone because they probably wouldn't get it. But it makes me think of Mary Oliver's poem *When I am Among the Trees*. She writes:

....Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."³

And my heart responds, "Yes!"
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled

¹ Malcolm Guite *Sounding the Seasons*, published by Canterbury Press UK

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³ <https://cih.ucsd.edu/sites/cih.ucsd.edu/files/cfm/When I am among the Trees by Mary Oliver.pdf>

with light, and to shine.” she says. “Yes!” I exclaim, “ I want to catch some of the light, some of the shimmer from Jesus, from the leaves, some of the hints of divinity, in my humanity.”

At the same time, I think of Leonard Cohen’s ‘cracks where the light shines through’, and Peter Mayer’s words⁴ which reference Japanese *kinsugi* ‘I have some cracks in me, they have been filled with gold.. I do not hide the cracks, make them shine instead, so now every old scar shows.. all of these jagged lines make me more beautiful..see how they shine of gold.’

And we do our daily practices our walking our meditating our painting our gardening our dancing faithfully daily, keeping our eyes open our ears open and so often we see nothing. I remember being on retreat once, an eight day retreat, On the last morning I was just resting, giving up because it was the end of the retreat, not trying, when I had a vision of sorts, of Jesus in a top hat, dancing and walking with me and teaching me about water wearing away a stone. It was at the end of the retreat when I had stopped trying that I experienced something more. So who knows what will happen today, tonight, this morning, tomorrow.

Anthony Cane reflects: Jesus does not stay on the mountain, but immediately descends into the maelstrom of demanding crowds and fierce opposition that will eventually lead to his own experience of darkness and death. The Transfiguration is not disconnected from human destructiveness, but part of God’s response and God’s healing⁵.

Cane continues: The presence of Moses and Elijah indicate that Jesus stands in the Hebrew tradition of the patriarchs and prophets; and they speak of his ‘departure’, which in Greek is ‘*exodos*’. Jesus is to fulfil that exodus tradition and by fulfilling it transform it. His ‘exodus’ is to Jerusalem, to suffer, to be mocked, derided, repudiated and then crucified. And yet on the mountain top the divine voice also commands its hearers to ‘listen to him’. However paradoxical it may seem, Jesus’ exodus, his death march to Jerusalem, is also the journey to the place of resurrection. If Jesus is to lead his people home, and to a better future, he must become the crucified one before he can be the resurrected one.’⁶ ‘Listen to him.’

Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks of the Christian vocation as follows: ‘Our thought and love should penetrate the flesh of things like X-rays and bring to light the divine bones in them.’⁷ As Malcolm Guite’s Transfiguration sonnet puts it: ‘Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar, Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.’

This Transfiguration, which we celebrate just before Lent begins is a moment of grace and glory and beauty, in which, as Malcolm Guite says,
‘The love that dances at the heart of things

⁴ Peter Maher Japanese Bowl

⁵ <https://www.portsmouthcathedral.org.uk/sermons-lectures-and-talks/archive/2783ryefhwkcjn-f3mfe-2dcwd-p4dzd-rtg59-a87fx-c9hgm-7gpdw-dd3pd-wlts8-96pt7-yyb9w-e5hc5-m76jd-xm3ex-fwldn-s9yw9-8t8hg>. The Very Reverend Dr Anthony Cane

⁶ *ibid.*,

⁷ *ibid.*,

Shone out upon us from a human face.'

Can you imagine that for a moment, 'the love that dances at the heart of things', what does that look like? 'Shone out upon us from a human face'. Wow!

I imagine you've all seen that sometimes, something lighting up a human face, it may be love, it may be transcendence, but sometimes you can see it, you can feel it.

'There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.'
Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and mystic, said after a mystical experience on a busy street in Louisville, USA, an experience which marked a pivotal moment in his life. He continues to reflect on his experience:

It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed... But this cannot be seen, only believed and 'understood' by a peculiar gift."⁸

That's what he knew. So as we walk into Lent, many of us participating in a retreat in daily life, a retreat where we daily choose to find spaces to be, to reflect, to be open to the shining, as we walk this Lenten death march to Jerusalem and beyond, my prayer for you, for me, for us, is that we too may find light in the deadlines in the plain, in the people we meet, in our meditation. It might be at the IGA. It might be the mother walking with her child to school. It might be playing tennis or watching the footy or cricket, a moment which you might miss if you are not paying attention, God with us, God with Jesus and his disciples all the way to the end and beyond.

The second letter of Peter speaks of Transfiguration as 'a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.'⁹ This is surely an encouragement that our scary world, our parlous climate, injustice, death and our own situation, will not have the last word.

'Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.'

⁸ Thomas Merton *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

⁹ 2 Peter 1:19