Reflection on The Transfiguration, February 17th 2021 prepared by Fiona

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these important seasons of the year. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation.

If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate in our homes at 7.30pm on Wednesday. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: Although today marks Ash Wednesday the first day of lent, I wanted to step back a few days for this reflection. The Sunday just past is called Transfiguration Sunday within some quarters of the Church. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the placing of repentance ashes on the foreheads of participants. Repentance and Transfiguration (change) are somewhat the chicken and the egg.

Fundamentally, the matter which exploded in the so-called Big Bang billions of years ago was a transfiguration or a change of appearance. Transfiguration is a feature of history with spiritual expressions in all world religions and within the realm of science. The Christian understanding is that Christ's consciousness took possession of matter, matter was therefore spiritualized. Another way of putting it comes from Teilhard de Chardin who, writing from a scientific point of view, gave it a meaning for modern man. Teilhard presented an evolutionary view of matter evolving into life and into consciousness, as matter developed even greater complexity and concentration. The point at which all matter and life and consciousness finds its ultimate meaning and purpose he called the "Omega point". He saw the whole universe converging on this ultimate point, where it is locally unified and centred. It is towards that supreme point of unity that the whole creation is moving.[1] Transfiguration in other words is proper to evolution.

The Transfiguration: The Bible tells us that Disciples of Jesus saw him transfigured on Mount Tabor, but what does this really mean? Transfigured means changed, but who was really Transfigured? The Disciples were changed to enable them to perceive the true glory of Christ, a preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit later at Pentecost. Belief is a powerful thing. Borrowing from the apostle Paul, the 4th-century theologian St. Augustine of Hippo said, only after profound inner change can we pass through the image in the glass to be received by the face to face vision of God and be transformed into the same image. (Augustine On the Trinity,

[1] https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/24026/Hovedoppgavex-xBedexGriffiths.pdf?sequence=1

book 15, ch 20; 1 Cor 13). Augustine was talking about achieving union with God in this life, the ultimate transformation.

The transformation on the mountain is no more use than a legend unless it becomes our transformation. This Gospel passage from Mark is not about converting those who are blinded by their unbelief (2 Corinthians 4:4), but about the conversion to the desire to be the Wisdom of Christ in the world.

To achieve this, even momentarily, we need a shift, a glimpse of God's glory, in everyday miracles, and we need to reflect on these. Winter can be dark and wet in our corner of the Northern Hemisphere. In the current lockdown state, some of us, especially if we are shielding may have begun to lose our sense of time. The Darkness of both the season and the pandemic may have affected our mood, disposition, and ability to find much to look forward to. Even the promised snow didn't materialize. We need inspiration, and we can either look to the wonders of science or see this in everyday experiences.

Sometimes, at this time of year, as is happening while I am writing this reflection, the clouds shift and lift to reveal a sliver of blue sky just above the tree line in my garden. Shafts of sunlight fall momentarily on the bare branches of our 400-year-old oak, a couple of early daffodils incline toward the light. I am reminded of my childhood habit of closing my eyes and letting the large dots of oranges pinks and golds give a light show behind my eyelids. The view in my garden is changed momentarily, and my mood is changed for a little longer. I see this short experiences as mini spiritual experiences and transformative for a brief time. Of course if one is lucky enough to have a telescope, a peep at God's wonders are available 24/7 on any evening with a clear sky.

We need illumination to help us see clearly and for us to change. God is revealed in light; in the perfection of beauty, God shines forth to give us a glimpse of what is to come (Psalm 50:02), For now, small moments like the one I just described help us develop the habit of allowing the glory of God to shine in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The story of the Transfiguration often focuses on changes in the appearance of Jesus. I believe these to be superficial although a peep through the telescope is uplifting. Jesus is God and therefore, unchanging. The story is really about Peter and John and James. The Gospel is written through the eyes of the Disciples. So, when we read "his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." this means that Peter and John and James's perception changed. The Disciples were the ones who were transfigured on the mountain; furthermore, this enlightenment was not for their benefit. Think of Moses and the Burning Bush, the bush may have altered temporarily through God's appearance. Moses was the one transfigured into a leader able to commit to God's purposes. Transformation is more than a feel good event, we often have to do of face uncomfortable things.

In the Old Testament book 2 Kings 2, the Prophet Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven by a whirlwind, before this event, Elijah's disciple asks for a double share of his master's spirit. Elisha receives his request, which becomes his Transfiguration, and the beginning of his ability to see and navigate God's ways. Transformation gave Elisha the power to be a wonder-worker. One story tells of his feeding of a hundred men with twenty loaves of new barley, leaving some left over, a story that prefigures the miracle of feeding the 5,000 by Jesus in the New Testament. (2 Kings 4:38-44)

In the New Testament, just after feeding the 5,000, we meet Elijah again in Mark's Gospel, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a high mountain. The Transfiguration scene is set with the provocative claim that "there are some standing here who will lot taste death until they see that the at the kingdom of God has come with power." Jesus was beginning to prepare his disciples, who were ordinary people for transformation. They needed this grace to spread the Gospel after his death and Resurrection; the word 'power' is essential here.

John's Gospel tells us that for Jesus prayer involved sharing the eternal glory of his heavenly Father. It may be that for Jesus, this experience of Transfiguration was not an unusual one. It certainly was notable for the disciples. As the Gospel of Mark tells us, the Disciples witnessed the appearance of Jesus change; he becomes dazzlingly white, in the Gospel of Matthew, we read that his face shone (Matthew 17). The disciples certainly saw that prayer and meditation brought the human Jesus closer to God.

The splendour of the Transfiguration confirms Jesus' status as God's Beloved Son and affirms the Disciples' position. Jesus appears with Elijah and Moses; God's voice comes from a cloud repeating the words heard at Jesus's baptism to the terrified disciples. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" The vision disappears, and Christ ends up "alone" in solitary splendour in the Transfiguration (Moses and Elijah had disappeared). Mark's Gospel assumes a profound spiritual continuity with the Law and the Prophets of Israelite tradition; Jesus is not a successor but represents exemplification and fulfilment. High on the mountain, in a moment of luminous splendour, Jesus was indeed clothed in the dazzling light of God—but only briefly and to only three Disciples. If we were John, James or Peter, we too would have been transformed by awe, feeling we had a mission to God's people, this is the power of Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration location on Mount Tabor may also be important. Mount Tabor is situated at the border between three tribes – Naphtali, Zebulun and Issachar. At the time when Jesus moved from village to village, the population of the coastal region of Zebulun included a high percentage of Greeks, Romans and Asiatics. Biblical commentators often say very little about the Disciples' peaceful movement through the pagan population of the region. Through the Transfiguration of the three disciples by Grace Christ was seen in a new and more profound reality, the early Church offered that same mountain top experience of Christ.

As we approach Lent, we often focus on the suffering of Jesus on the Cross as a spiritual good in itself, a private bearing of personal woes for the sake of Jesus who died to save us. The Cross is thus redemptive only for ourselves—a theology which I believe is misguided and fruitless. Such theology has historically given the power to earthly regimes of domination, exploitation, greed, and deception and denies the life-giving truth of the Resurrection, the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

Jesus died at the hands of unenlightened and untransformed religious leaders and Roman hegemony by the Cross, a commonly used symbol of torture and death under Roman power. When Jesus said, "Take up your Cross" and follow me, the Cross is converted from an icon of human evil into the symbol of God's powerful, assertive love that challenges, exposes, and seeks to transform evil. Such love is ultimately what is genuinely redemptive and saving. The pursuit of God's Wisdom is borne in social and personal righteousness. The transfiguration story is a call to affirm the ultimate truth of God and God's way of salvation and to begin living it with all our heart, soul, and strength. Christ's nonviolent way is not a path to suffering but indeed the way of salvation, healing, and eternal life. And the unity with creation which makes us at one with God's ultimate purposes. This is what both Augustine and Teilhard de Chardin were talking about and the purpose and intention of transformation of heart and mind signified by Ash Wednesday.

Beginning Meditation: Let us prepare now for our meditation. Notice any tightness in your shoulders and neck and allow any tension in your muscles to relax. Allow your back to rest upright. Be conscious of where your body is touching the chair. Allow your breathing to settle, allow your body to slow down. You may wish to silently repeat a sacred word, bring to mind an image or simply focus on your breath as an aid to mediation.

We Meditate for 25 Minutes…

Post meditation reading:

“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire… “God is not

remote from us. He is at the point of my pen, my (pick) shovel, my paint brush, my (sewing) needle - and my heart and thoughts….Remain true to yourself, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge."

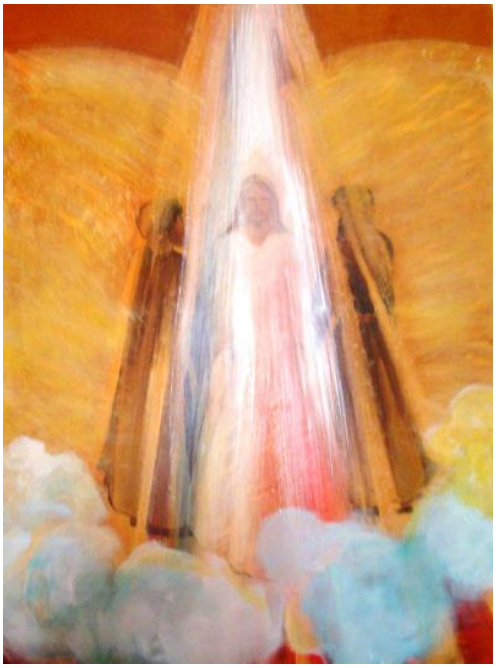
Pierre Teilhard De Chardin

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…Amen.

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon. Stay well and stay safe.

Resources:
Images of the Transfiguration







Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.