

Angela's Ramblings Sunday next before Lent.
Psalm 50, 2 Kings 2 1- 13. 2 Corinthians 4 v 3-6 Mark 9 v 2-9.

Very many years ago, I was in training to be a member of the "Church Army". You may never have heard of the Church Army, or do not know who or what they are. They are an organisation within the Church of England who have a ministry for mission in a wide variety of situations including churches. Why I tell you this is because the Gospel reading for today, The Transfiguration, was the very first sermon that I ever preached. Quite daunting when you know that every word was going to be examined afterwards by one's tutors. Nevertheless, I have never forgotten the studies that I did then, and the insights that I came to at the time, and still hold.

When Jesus embarked on his ministry, the impression that we have is that he went forward with authority and confidence of knowing the future, of knowing how it would turn out. We see that he called a group of men to come with him in his endeavour, as helpers and witnesses. I was at a seminar once led by a bishop who claimed that the disciples of Jesus were purely there as witnesses, to tell the story and carry on the message after Jesus's death. Yes I believe that is so and certainly at the transfiguration that is how they were portrayed. Yet I also think there is something deeper too. For I believe Jesus did not call people to be around him just as observers, or something for the Facebook of the day, but as companions. They became his friends and the people who would be with him on the journey. They were there to walk with him and share meals and share the cup of his suffering no matter how inadequately.

I do not believe Jesus was a loner, or someone who was aloof from the world as he is often portrayed, but he was fully involved in life. He shared and enjoyed the ordinary things of life and made deep relationships. This was not only men, but women too were there to support him and provide for him. We see this particularly so when he is in the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. There is a sense of him being amongst true friends, people he knows and trusts, and can be relaxed in their company. Jesus was human with feelings, yearnings and fears.

This brings me to the Transfiguration. On one level, the disciples are there to witness the events, but equally, did Jesus take Peter, James and John up the mountain because he did not want to be alone? He had just told the disciples and the crowd that the Son of Man must undergo suffering and that anyone who wants to be his follower must also take up their cross and follow him. Did he, by saying these words to the crowd, reveal to himself what he knew in his heart? This was going to happen to him! Did the full implications of his mission come to him and he was scared? We are told he took them up the mountain to be by themselves, the need to have space, silence and reflection. It was whilst in prayer that Jesus was transfigured. It was since that first sermon that I have believed it was for Jesus himself that the transformation took place. It was God saying you are my Son, my chosen one. I know you are fearful, I know you may feel alone, but I will be with you always.

Of course those who were with him did not know what to say or do, as we might say, they were out of their comfort zone. They were overcome with the whole situation. How could they keep this moment, how could they capture it? Of course they couldn't. It was a brief but significant moment in time that could not be locked in a box. It could only be set in their memory. However for the man Jesus, it brought strength and courage to face what was ahead. He set his face to the task as he went back down the mountain with Peter, James and John to continue his ministry with the people he had been called to.

I expect for most of you reading this, you can look back and think of your moment of transfiguration. That time perhaps when you thought you had to face something alone but miraculously you discovered that God was indeed with you. Perhaps even the unlikely friend was there, or someone you trusted, and like Jesus, you drew strength from the companionship. Those people who walk with us on our journey are God given and invaluable. Perhaps in your life you have had a transfiguration moment when God has literally confronted you, and your life changed and you were set on a new path. In my role as a chaplain in a prison, I met a man who told me one night God came to him and shook him and turned his whole life upside down. Up to that point he had never thought about God. He did not even know who God was, but he was adamant that it was God who confronted him. When I met him, he was on a journey of discovery of finding out about God, and who was Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He knew nothing but that God was real. There is many a conversation I have with people who ask, "So what made you become a vicar?" As if it is a job one chooses to do. It is sometimes quite difficult to explain one cannot do any other.

In Mark's gospel, the text says, "Suddenly they looked and saw only Jesus". Isn't that true of our lives sometimes? Jesus is the only person we do see as he reveals himself to us. 2 Corinthians says of the light shining in the darkness, the light of God is revealed in our hearts and we are touched by Jesus. We see the depth of his love and know it. In this time of darkness it can be hard to keep faith. We wonder if this uncertainty and fear will ever end but secretly we do know God is with us. What I am sure we must try to do, is look for those moments of transfiguration, where God meets us where we are and tells us not to despair, he is with us on our journey. Sometimes it is hard to believe, and we are afraid, but, like Jesus, perhaps we too must go to that quiet place and allow God to speak to us and allow our hearts and minds to be filled with the gentleness of God and to be renewed in faith.

God bless keep safe.
Angela