

## The Transfiguration

*Fr Michael 26/2/17*

The week before last Fr David gave me some time off and I headed to Dorset to visit my college friend Jane, for two nights. She gave me a tour of three of the five churches her incumbent is the rector of and we caught up on news and swapped reflections on our ministry and how our new vocation is going. On the second day we set off in the car towards Swanage from Wareham, visiting a lovely church, at Arne, where she was to preach in two days time for a BCP communion. Back in the car, we eventually climbed a hill and as we reached the summit a wonderful sight lay before us. Corfe Castle is somewhere you may have visited yourselves, on seeing it I remembered it from two previous visits; as a child and as a very young man. It is stunning. The castle and village are in a valley, surrounded on all sides by hills, yet the castle is itself on a steep hill or mound - no doubt of the mote and bailey kind - and it is almost out of this world! It comes upon you so unexpectedly, it is suddenly there before your eyes, towering walls, strong and formidable reaching up into the sky; which on this day was bright blue, - a sight to behold! Something I would like to capture! We did not stop. I didn't want to or needed to. That sight was enough for me, and so we pressed on towards Swanage.

I was reminded of this encounter when I read today's Gospel and Epistle. In the encounter in the gospel four friends are climbing a mountain side, Jesus and three disciples - who have been called the inner circle, Peter, James and John. The same three are selected by Jesus to go further with him in the garden of Gethsemane on the night Jesus is arrested. In today's reading they have a vision, which was 'out of this world' of Jesus talking to the prophets Moses and Elijah. Peter refers to this event in his epistle we heard. He says they were eyewitnesses. All three synoptic gospels have this event recorded - it must have been amazing - to see the Lord transfigured, transformed we might say, or changed - to see Jesus in Glory yet during his earthly life. A human being whom they had already spent a considerable amount of time with - changed briefly before their eyes, shining, glowing, radiating light, surrounded by cloud - transfigured. Jesus glimpsed - for who he was and for what the future would hold. I would have liked to capture my first glimpse of Corfe castle from the car - Peter wanted to capture the moment, to have something to remember this special and amazing event by. Three dwellings are his initial thought - three booths like the Jews would build at the festival of booths - remembering that they were once without homes, wandering in the desert. We have cameras, Peter had only physical objects or whatever was around on the mountain side - stones, some wood perhaps. He wanted to remember this event for years to come for it was a brief glimpse

'behind the scenes.' This was a thin place, where briefly the divide between heaven and earth was thin and the disciples could see through and their lives be changed forever.

The return of Moses and Elijah was prophesied as 'expected' before the Messianic age - so the sight of these two great figures from the Jewish past had meaning - meaning that the apostles would only make sense of after Jesus had suffered, been crucified and then risen from the dead.

Interestingly enough, it was Moses and Elijah who were the only prophets to speak with God on Mt Sinai. There are echoes here of Moses approaching God at Sinai, the cloud, the blinding light - he takes three companions, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. They wait further off while Moses approaches the light. There is strong meaning here; that Jesus is the new Moses, leading the people to a new life, saving them, being misunderstood - both Moses and Elijah experienced suffering and rejection - Jesus would follow this pattern.

Then there are the words from heaven - words from out of the cloud - words that have been heard before, at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Echoes here from Isaiah, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him." Words that allude to suffering - the suffering servant - the suffering that was inevitable for Jesus in that he would lay down his life for us all.

The next time Jesus is flanked by two figures it won't be Moses and Elijah - it will be two criminals and it won't be glowing light, but darkness. In both of these events Jesus is confessed as the Son of God. The centurion at the cross is here prefigured by Peter, who verses before this passage has declared to Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." On the cross the bystanders think Jesus calls out for Elijah - in this encounter Elijah actually appears.

Two pictures are presented before us - yet despite all the similarities and the signs they are pictures of very differing colours. The transfiguration is a glimpse of what will be, and what will be necessary before Jesus is seated as we see him on our east wall in majesty, our Lord revealed in glory.

The transfiguration prepared this inner group of disciples and particularly Peter. The transfiguration prepares us as we journey towards Lent and onwards to the Passion, the Cross and the Resurrection. And Jesus can come to us, touch us and say 'Get up and do not be afraid' - this is why we are here gathered around a table - to be touched, raised up and healed - and shown the future; that we might know his power to change and save. Amen.