

Sermon for Trinity & Transfiguration Sunday 6th August 2017

Susan Peatfield, Reader

Change – some of us dread it. Some of us pray for it. Change – the word and the experience all depend on where we are standing. I have recently received through the post a new contactless Tesco Clubcard. It is probably a tragic insight into my life that I found this quite exciting and had a very merry time at the Hoover Building last week joking with the lady on the till as I touched in for the first time. It had been a different story a couple of months ago when they - to my mind senselessly - moved the tinned tomatoes to a new aisle. Not so much joking then with the poor man who had to redirect me. Trivial examples obviously, but saying something of our or at least my varying response to things changing.

August is for many of us a month when things change. Even if we are not locked into the timetable of school terms we can notice that things are different. Fewer cars on the road in the rush hour, more children around everywhere else, familiar faces away on holiday - or perhaps the activities that mark our week, a class or club are suspended for the summer. And we, we are either relishing the rest or a little lost and at sea until September comes with its new pencil cases for some and its renewed rhythms and certainties for others.

More significant changes might be a first child starting school or a last child leaving, retirement either looming or beckoning depending again on our perspective. A relationship beginning or ending. All these things will mean a change, not just in what we do but how we think about who we are. For change even when it is good and for the best can make us lose our bearings. And when it is for what seems the worst, nostalgia for better times is more likely to engulf us than the new difficulties we find.

Why all this talk of change? Because it is August and because things feel different but more of course because of our Gospel reading today – the account of the Transfiguration in Luke's Gospel. When Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain and they see Jesus transfigured – changed in their eyes.

The passage we heard today is in the middle of chapter 9 – a long and eventful chapter in Luke including the sending out of the disciples to overcome demons and cure diseases, the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and some key teaching about who Jesus is and his purpose. Just before the passage we heard today Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?".

After the miracles and the signs and wonders many speculate that he is John the Baptist returned to earth or Elijah – the great prophet of the Jewish people. But "who do you say that I am?" Jesus persists. Peter answers "God's Messiah". The one who will turn the whole world upside down. Jesus gives a glimpse of what this will mean: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." What the disciples make of all this is unclear, but there is a clue in how our passage

today begins. Luke 9 verse 28: "About a week after this he took Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray."

About a week after this. I think we can be allowed to imagine the kind of questioning and conversation that went on the week after Peter identifies Jesus not just as an extraordinary man but as the Messiah – God's anointed. What does Peter mean? Is Jesus a new Elijah? Now Jesus has probably explained many times the kind of kingdom he is showing them. Not earthly power but spiritual power, not the dominion of death but life everlasting, but whatever has been said or not said, understood or not understood Jesus chooses to share another glimpse of his meaning. And that is what Peter and James and John receive on the Mount of Transfiguration. They see that the appearance of Jesus face is changed and his clothes become dazzling white. He is joined by Moses and Elijah and from the cloud comes the voice of God himself: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him."

At one simple yet breathtaking level what Jesus has been saying is confirmed by God in the hearing of the disciples - and the fact that he is not Elijah. At another level we must ask what have the disciples really seen? For they might say that they saw Jesus transfigured - changed. But in fact Jesus is not changed it is just that they literally see him in a new light. Jesus is always God's Son the Anointed. It is not Jesus who is changed at the Transfiguration but the disciples.

For they must be changed to be and to live his kingdom. If they are to cure the sick, feed the hungry, build the kingdom, live forever, then it is not enough to know who Jesus is but to become like him. This is the change that truly turns the world upside down.

Our world, yours and mine. If we are to share Jesus' message with our world we shall not do it by what we know about his life but what of him is alive in us now - today. The glimpses our lives show of his eternal love and glory. Allowing him shine dazzlingly in us.

So perhaps we must change how we see change. Changes in our personal lives are not just about things happening to us but about how we are being changed. Not what the change is but what the change is that is happening in me. How is Christ able to shine in me in this?

This might feel rather remote this morning. Perhaps this August is more of a valley than a peak. But the disciples are not allowed to stay forever on the mountain top either. There are dark days ahead when all that shining seems very far away for them too. What has changed is the knowledge that the same Jesus who walks with them everyday - the one who shares with them every joy and every pain is also always at the same time the one who redeems the world and makes all things new. And for us today the sudden glimpse of the truth that all the changes of life the ones that we greet with joy and the ones that break our hearts are all transfigured by Christ's love. Amen