

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Introduction

Today is Transfiguration Sunday – here we see the absolute revelation of a mountaintop experience, that is then heightened by the urgency of human need. It is also the concluding Sunday for the season of Epiphany, as well as the Sunday before Lent.

Our lectionary texts, hymns and prayers are full of allusions to the glory of God, to Jesus Christ's radiating in Holy light and to how we can allow ourselves to be stretched and transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Call to worship

O Lord, open our lips,

And we shall praise your name

Send out your light and truth to be our guide.

Let them lead us to your holy hill, to your dwelling-place

Glory to the Father, and to the son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Adoration

Almighty God,

Strong and powerful,

Unique and invincible,

We live to honour you

You are the King of glory,

You are the one who made heaven

and the earth

and everything in it

You are our consolation and our saviour

You are our strength and our song.

Before you, in you and through you,

we open hearts and minds

we are ready to receive the seeds

of care and love

to go out to sow compassion and healing

to our war weary and sick stricken world

You are so welcome here with us today,

our Transfigured Lord and King. **Amen**

Hymn 1: STF 59– Shine, Jesus, shine

(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here.)

<https://youtu.be/gr5Y63bDNNg>

Verse 1

Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Verse 2

Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By the blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Verse 3

As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus

Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins.

Holy God, it is good that we are here to experience once again the radiance of Jesus's transfigured presence. We confess that we sometimes fail to "listen to the chosen one" as you instruct us to do. We confess that we sometimes fail to love you and to love our neighbours as ourselves. We ask you to forgive us for our sins and to give us the strength to renounce all that hinders our walk with you. Give us wisdom and courage to rise up and boldly execute justice and righteousness so that we might see the grace of your son, our Lord of glory. Amen.

Silence

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1: 8-9)

Amen. Thanks be to God

1st Reading: Exodus 34: 29-35-New Revised Standard Version

The Shining Face of Moses

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant^[a] in his

hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2nd Reading: Luke 9: 28-43 New Revised Standard Version

The Transfiguration

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus^[a] took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his

companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,^[b] they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,^[c] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” — not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen;^[d] listen to him!” ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, in those days, told no one any of the things they had seen.

Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he^[e] shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Reflection

I have always been attracted to Mountains – and I think it is because I was born in a place where the hills, surrounding what is now the city of Freetown, was mapped out and named the Lioness Mountain. The landscape is quite fascinating with lots of space for perspectives. There is so much to behold of God’s creation, and it is no wonder why the Portuguese explorer Pedro de Sintra, who discovered this “oddly shaped formation” as he described it, called “Serra Lyoa” meaning the sound of roaring lions in the mountains. This is what we now know as the beautiful country called Sierra Leone.

We hear so often about people wanting to go on expeditions and to climb mountains like Mt Kilimanjaro, Mt Everest, Mt Fuji etc. Mountains are particular and poignant. They call to mind the majesty and awe and heights of the heavens, and yet the reality of the valleys below.

Throughout Biblical history, mountains have also been important. They are sacred places and symbolic of God’s revelation to humankind. Mountaintop experiences are wonderful and transformative, but they can also be fleeting. There is a sense of transcendence, and the feeling can be quite ecstatic. God gives the Mountaintop experience in order to sustain God’s people as they go down into the valley, into the reality of the chaos and messiness in the world in which they live. It is an experience of significant revelation, intended to help us journey with God in Jesus more closely on the road ahead.

It was on the mountains of Ararat that Noah's ark came to rest after the flood (Genesis 8: 4) God made a covenant with him there. Moses received the Ten Commandments right on the top of Mount Sinai. (Exodus 20) and his task was to lead God's people to the promised land. It was on Mt Carmel that Elijah outperformed the false prophets of Baal. (1 Kings 18: 16-39) Elijah had to confront wickedness in the land and appoint the next prophet. Jesus taught his disciples on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24: 3). It was on mount Zion that King David built his city, which was later called Jerusalem (Isaiah 8: 18) And it was on Mt Tabor that Jesus was transfigured.

At the Transfiguration scene, Jesus is in the company of three of his disciples James, John, and Peter. He is praying and suddenly something strange happens. Jesus' appearance changes and he turns dazzling white and just as suddenly he encounters Moses, and Elijah- ancient prophets both of whom had their own mountain- top experiences as mentioned earlier. He converses with them about his impending crucifixion. Peter decides to speak up and says *"Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,^[d] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"*—But before he could finish what he was saying, they were again suddenly engulfed in a cloud and heard a voice saying *"This is my Son, my Chosen,^[d] listen to him!"* After the voice had spoken, the cloud disappears, Moses and Elijah are gone and Jesus is left, alone. Peter, James, and John were completely overwhelmed. They got a glimpse of Jesus in his glory and were clearly terrified and

told no one of what they had witnessed. There are connections here too with Jesus' baptism found at the beginning of Luke in Luke 3: 21-22. When Jesus is baptised and was praying, a voice is heard saying *"You are my Son, the Beloved;^[d] with you I am well pleased"*.

So, both here on the mountain of Transfiguration and at his Baptism, there is confirmation from heaven that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus explains that God's messiahship is one in which the Messiah will suffer and die and be resurrected. These are intertwined and we cannot have one without the other.

Christ's Lordship is shown in his death on the cross and in his resurrection.

This is indeed a unique moment, symbolic of God's revelation to humankind. God has chosen to reveal God's self in ways that are miraculous and breath taking. What God is doing in Jesus, God is doing as part of what has happened before. Here we see Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. As Elijah was taken up by the chariots of heaven, as he passed his cloak to Elisha among those marvelling prophets in Jericho and Bethel, so Jesus' transfiguration and his death and resurrection will be the hinge of all their history and ours too. Jesus is God's son, the Chosen one, the Messiah.

And it is interesting that today, Transfiguration Sunday marks the end of another of the church's liturgical season- The Epiphany- the revealing season. I believe that God is offering us an Epiphany today in the words in Luke 9: 35....*"This is my Son, my Chosen,^[d] listen to him!"* These are words that God wants

to say directly to you and to me. Words for our hearts. Words for our lives. And so, I want to invite you, to just close your eyes and listen to these words.*“This is my Son, my Chosen,^[d] listen to him!”*And having seen Jesus in his full glory, having heard God’s words confirming Jesus’ identity and having been instructed to listen to the Messiah, we are now enabled to pick up the mantle and to set the stage for the impending season of Lent which starts on Wednesday. The Transfiguration story is just what we need to bolster us as we travel with Jesus into the unrelenting journey to Jerusalem and the cross.

As a child, I was taught that the Transfiguration is very important because it reveals Christ’s divine nature. In my adulthood and in my study of theology in particular, I have come to understand that the Transfiguration is a major Christological event - It is a powerful and bold moment that invites us to look to Christ for meaning. To look to Christ as an example of how to live- for in the actions of Jesus, we have a roadmap for what we are called to be and to do in this world. I am also reminded of my Methodist roots, that sense that “Methodism was raised to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land”. The original context of this saying was in relation to the necessity for Christian discipleship and our commitment to making grace visible by both word and deed. Wesley’s own regular practice was to meet the needs of the poor, speaking up against injustices, calling for Government

interventions, increased employment opportunities, dedication to human rights and opposing slavery etc.

Jesus is the pillar of light that leads us on the journey to make grace visible and accessible, therefore it is essential that we follow, that “we listen to him”. Like the three disciples in this event, we would not always know how to respond. Like Peter, we might want to stay in the moment, erecting buildings and maybe setting up property committees and the like, as a way of preserving it.

However, we will be led back down from the mountain unto the plain and given the hope and courage to face the world of everyday human need where Jesus heals the sick and opposes the forces of evil. We will be drawn into our own personal and communal transfiguration as we seek to follow Jesus in love, mercy, and grace. We will encounter him in a special way that we have never experienced before. We will see and hear glory. We will hear the call to do the will of God for it is the call to do God’s will that pushes Jesus out of the transcendence of the mountain top experience to engage with the great crowd which had gathered below, leading to the healing of a sick boy and transformation for others. In this encounter we see that Christ is willing to engage with challenging situations and to answer the distraught request of a desperate father begging for healing for his son.

Jesus does not give up on the agenda of life. The mountain top experience had catapulted his passion for healing, caring, and

loving. And this is what he calls us to be and to do. The agenda of God is to give life. And we see that, and we experience that in our scripture readings today. That the journey of God, whether in his appearance to Moses or in the Transfiguration and throughout Biblical history is to bring the fullness of life. And this is what God is calling us to be and to do. God calls us to be our best selves. And our best selves are always connected to a deep faith that is compassionate and lifegiving. In Jesus we are healed, we are set free, we are made whole and brought back into relationship with the father.

May we have mountaintop experiences that will enable us to show to the world that the values of Christianity are deep within us.

May we like Jesus be more compassionate and like John Wesley, continue to spread scriptural holiness.

May we like the unnamed father begging for healing for his child, ask for healing and for God's blessings on others.

In the name of the triune God- the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of Intercessions.

Holy God, we come before now with our prayers of intercessions. We pray for the church throughout the world and its leaders. We thank you that you continue to reveal yourself to us. May we be open to your word and your way. Rekindle the light of Christ in us so that we will continue to reflect your glory and grace in our world.

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

God of all creation, who cannot be contained by our boundaries. We pray for the world in which we live. Scarred by strife, war, terrorism, sickness and oppression and the Covid -19 Pandemic. Send us as witnesses of gospel joy into a world of fragile peace, broken promises and sickness Touch all hearts with your love so we may in turn, love each other.

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

God of healing we lift up those who need healing in body mind and spirit. May they know that you are here and now. May they be healed by the touch of your hand. May they feel your embrace and may they experience your glory

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

God of provision, we call to mind those who are hungry and homeless. Those with multiple and complicated needs. Those in distress. We pray that they will experience Christ the Morning star and behold by faith the light of his countenance and the lightning of their burdens.

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

Merciful God we remember with thanksgiving those who have died. May their souls continue to rest in peace and may they rise in glory. We lift up those who are grieving. We pray for comfort and peace for them

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

Faithful God we pray for ourselves, that we may continue to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, that we may be renewed in holiness and reflect your love in the way that we live, through our actions and our words.

Gracious God

Transfigure and heal us

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, the chosen, the transfigured Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come.

thy will be done.

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses.

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation.

but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn 2: STF 351- In Christ alone my hope is found

(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here)

<https://youtu.be/rn9-UNer6MQ>

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found

He is my light, my strength, my song

This cornerstone, this solid ground

Firm through the fiercest drought and storm

What heights of love, what depths of peace

When fears are stilled, when strivings cease

My comforter, my all in all

Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh

Fullness of God in helpless babe

This gift of love and righteousness

Scorned by the ones He came to save

Till on that cross as Jesus died

The wrath of God was satisfied

For every sin on Him was laid

Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Keith Getty (b.1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963)

Benediction and sending out

We go into the world to walk in God's light,
To rejoice in God's love and to reflect God's glory

May the light of Jesus shine in us

May the light of Jesus shine through us to others.

May we all bring others to be saints for Jesus. Amen

(Hebrews 13: 20-21)

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