

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

And so here we are – time never stands still and we are now at the week before Lent, with Pancake or Shrove Tuesday just ahead of us, followed swiftly by Ash Wednesday. Time never stands still.

Today is the moment when we move from the joys of Christmas; the journeying of Epiphany; and the significance, brightness and poignancy of Candlemas. And now, we very clearly and sharply move into Lent on Wednesday – and journey together thoughtfully and reflectively, and purposefully through Lent to the Passion of Jesus; the cross; that moment of bereft and emptiness on the Saturday and then to the joy and wonder of the resurrection. What an amazing few weeks we have ahead of us to savour together if we choose to embrace it.

About ten years ago I remember sitting on the top level of a family friend's garden in glorious sunshine in my home town of Gourrock on the west coast of Scotland – the children playing happily together (!) supervised by Scott on the lower level whilst I enjoyed a few indulgent moments of peace and quiet. It was only a few weeks after my Mum had died and we were visiting family friends with my Dad. The weather was uncharacteristically warm for the west coast of Scotland. Their garden looked almost on top of and over the River Clyde and beyond on to one of the Lochs. It was quite an incredible day. It was warm and sunny – so sunny that the sun seemed to glow and bounce off the water, and the sky was the most amazing blue; and the water seemed bluer than I had ever seen it during my childhood years. It was as if time had stood still – there was just me and the sun. It couldn't have been anything other than a God moment – a moment where I was caught unawares, a moment which literally came out of the blue, a brief but long-lasting moment of reassurance and confirmation that even though we as a family had been going through tough times, we were definitely not alone and that we were being held firmly by God. With three children racing around a garden eating ice cream it hardly seems possible that this felt such a moment – and yet it was one that I can't forget – for time stood still and all was well.

I remember it being hard to break that moment – it was so beautiful – not in a gushy fluffy way but just in a moment filled quietly but very firmly with the presence of God. But such moments don't last physically for ever, even if they remain for ever in our souls/hearts.

And so it must have been with the disciples – they had had that moment of dazzling clarity on that mountain top with Jesus. They went up the mountain for some space and to pray and before their very eyes Jesus was transfigured or changed or transformed and Moses and Elijah the prophets who spoke of his coming were either side of him. “His face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white”. While he was still speaking, suddenly a

bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

The Transfiguration of Jesus is not easy to comprehend in this scientific age of reason and proof. How do we explain what happened up that mountain top? I'm not sure we can. But what we can do, is get a sense of the "otherness" of it all, a sense of the awe and wonder of it all, and the way it affected the disciples – the coming to an understanding that this miraculous moment is a gear change with the divinity of Jesus being highlighted.

What we do know is that the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment where Jesus' friends see Jesus for who he is. They see him in all his glory and the voice of God and the presence of Moses and Elijah affirms that Jesus is the one who the prophets have speaking of for centuries. The disciples fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. In this amazing moment humanity met divinity face to face and heard God's proclamation and affirmation that this man with whom they are journeying is indeed special and who they should listen to.

Such moments of revelation and wonder are moments of inspiration and energy and calm - all in one place. Moments which provide us with the security of the sense of an "otherness" – the sense of a presence of one who is filled with love. Some call such unexpected moments and places "thin places" – those places where the veil between this world and the eternal world is thinned or collapsed or pulled back just a little bit more than usual. Where the grace and wonder and awe of God is glimpsed with the impact being far greater than we can ever imagine.

Indeed in church we try every Sunday to create a space in which we can sense the grace and beauty and wonder and love of Christ – in our music and liturgy, in our singing and our quiet, in our coming forward and receiving communion, and in the space we make as we join together in worship.

We can try and provide a space where the awe and wonder, where the beauty and joy and love and reassurance of God's love will we pray become ever more apparent, or where the window to such beauty may be opened enough for us to be assured of the presence and love of God. Services like Free to Be provide the opportunity to be calm and still in the presence of our God who heals and feeds and restores our souls (if we give him the space to join us in our hearts). And quite differently to Free to Be but here at St Mary's and other places of worship we have the privilege to take funerals of our parishioners. One of our prayers is that we create the space and opportunity where people feel held and comforted even in what feels a very dark place in their lives as they mourn the loss of loved ones. With space, and calm, with love and prayer and word and music, we hold the services which we pray will open the door to a sense of hope in both this world and the next. .

The Transfiguration was so special that that Peter wanted to bottle it. He says “Let us build booths for Moses and Elijah”. But Jesus is very clear – the moment has now passed and they are to journey back to the foot of the mountain and get back to work! Straight back into the healing and teaching which marked this time of theirs and Jesus’ ministry. Jesus and his disciples are effectively making their way down from the mountain top where all was awesome and glorious, to work, and in time, to the foot of the cross (where for a time, all was dark.....but thank goodness, we know the end part of that story!)

Whilst not suggesting church this morning is “the mountain top”, we do pray that it provides each of us a sense of God’s light shining in on our lives.

As we begin our journey through Lent and in time, to the foot of the cross, may we leave with a sense of being fed, being loved, forgiven and blessed. May we leave with a sense of openness to God’s light gleaming in to our lives, sustaining and holding us, inspiring us with the knowledge of his love and his presence. May we leave here with the strength and courage to live our lives filled with light and courage to carry good news into all the corners of the world and to bring back the joy of his presence.

May we go in the light and peace to Christ to love and serve the Lord. Amen