



# The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Call to Worship:

From lakeside to mountain top,  
from lonely place to hillside,  
from touching lepers to touching glory,  
this has been the reign of God.

From baptism's water to mountain top glory,  
from calling disciples to the healing of many,  
from village life to transfiguration,  
we have moved in the glory of God.

The revealing,  
the making known,  
the unfolding,  
the manifesting,  
the unveiling,  
the unmasking,  
of Jesus.

From the Jordan to the present,  
from the beginning to here,  
from the Galilee to this place,  
let us worship in the transfigured light of God.

Prayer/Meditation:

Holy One,  
We come before you,  
many of us feeling like we have climbed just a part of the mountain,  
and there is so much more of a climb left to even get to point  
to dream that we might be dazzled by what is Divine.

Our loads are heavy,  
with worry, with regret,  
with fatigue, with illness,  
with despair for all in the world  
that is hurting, in danger, in bondage and more.

We trudge ahead, following you,  
stumbling, hoping, praying...

breathing hard, hearts pounding, and yes,  
even some of us are nimble and skipping.

Lead us Lord,  
to the top of that mountain,  
where we might be dazzled by your Light,  
lifted by what is Divine,  
filled by the sheer delight  
of what is bright and shining and grounded and real.

God of Mercy and Grace,  
you come to us in Jesus of Nazareth  
to break down the dividing walls of hostility between us:  
Yet we maintain walls that separate and isolate.

You give us the ministry of reconciliation:  
Yet we nurse our wounds and withhold mercy and forgiveness.

You invite us to join with Peter, James, and John  
on the mountain of Transfiguration:  
Yet we deny the wonders you have worked in our own lives.

You ask us to acknowledge and share our wealth:  
Yet we refuse to recognize and relieve the poverty around us.

You bless our lives with boundless love:  
Yet we fail to witness to that love,  
and so keep others from knowing you.

Forgive our selfishness, we pray.  
Transform us by your Spirit and your Word  
into that which pleases you,  
the image of Christ.

Oh Lord,  
You call us to go to the mountain top with you  
And we follow, not quite sure of what is to happen,  
but we like mountain tops,  
we like the view from up here,  
we like mountain top experiences.

Lord, sometimes we need mountain top experiences with you  
when our days are dark and dreary,  
when our hearts, are heavy,  
when the valleys seem more depressing than ever.

Lord, may this mountain top experience  
fill our hearts with your light,  
may we be filled with your love,

may we be filled with hope.

Lord, just as Moses and your disciples  
were changed by their experiences  
we too are changed and transformed  
into the image of Christ by your mercy.

Lord, may we have unveiled faces  
that reflect your love, your hope, and your light.

We pray this,  
for ourselves, for one another,  
and for the worlds in which we live.

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen**

Reading: Exodus 24:12-18

Hymn 489

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art-  
thou my best thought in the day or the night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
thou ever with me and I with thee, Lord.  
thou my great Father, thy child let me be,  
thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,  
thou my soul's shelter, and thou my strong tower;  
raise thou me heav'nward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise,  
thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,  
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,  
grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;  
heart of my own heart, what ever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Reading: Mark 9:2-9

Reflection:

Jesus goes up a mountain with three of his friends, Peter, James and John. On the mountain top, a change comes over him. He begins to glow. His face begins to shine like the sun and his clothes become dazzling white.

Then they see Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah, and Peter wants to build tents or tabernacles in honour of Moses and Elijah and Jesus. But before anyone can comment on this idea, a cloud appears from which a voice speaks - the voice of God - saying, behold my son, with whom I am pleased - listen to him.

Then all returns to normal; they go back down the mountain and Jesus tells them to keep quiet about the incident until after Jesus' death.

What are we to make of all that?

When this story was introduced to the Christian community in its written form in the gospel according to Mark - and Matthew's version is more or less identical - it was read by people whose culture and background was Jewish, and who would understand instantly the allusions and references of which this story is full and which we, as twenty-first century Christians, can easily miss altogether. To us, the story can be strange and bemusing; to them it had a clear message.

First there is the significant appearance of Moses and Elijah, the two greatest men in Jewish history. Here they are seen talking to Jesus, and the implication is obvious. Jesus is being portrayed as someone whose status is as great as these great men. And among the pantheon of great prophets and leaders, Moses and Elijah are two whose deaths were unusual. In deuteronomy chapter 34, Moses died alone and was buried by the Lord; in 2 Kings 2, Elijah is walking along with his apprentice Elisha when he is suddenly taken up to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire. Both Moses and Elijah, then, passed directly from this human world into the presence of God - and it is equality with these two that is being claimed for Jesus in this story.

There is also the bit about Jesus shining countenance and his whiter than white clothing. Again this is a reference to the Jewish scripture. We read from the book of Exodus that Moses also went up a mountain; that he also took with him three of his followers whose names were reported. A cloud appeared too, as in the transfiguration story. Moses went into the cloud, and when he returned forty days later, in Exodus 34:30, his face was shining because he had been speaking with the Lord. This speaks of the light of God's presence. The presence of God is signified by a dazzling white light, so bright and dazzling that it rubs off onto the features and clothing of those who come into direct contact with God.

So, when we put all these things together: the light of God's presence, the glowing face and clothes, the conversation with Moses and Elijah, we see more clearly what the writers of the gospel were trying to suggest - that Jesus is no less than the new Moses, the new Elijah. In fact Jesus is even greater than Moses or Elijah, because he has the light of the presence of God about him.

It is suggested by a couple of scholars that the story of the transfiguration was intended to be read to Christians at the time of the Hannukah celebration. Hannukah commemorates an incident in Jewish history that would have been fairly recent in Jesus time, the rededication of the Temple in 164 BC after the Maccabean wars. In a ceremony involving the lighting of candles on a special candlestick, a menorah, the Jewish people celebrate the return of the light

of God to the Temple, and Mark's story of the transfiguration suggests the idea that Jesus, and no longer the Temple, is the place where the light of God rests. In other words, the Temple has been superceded by Jesus himself. *He*, now, is the place where the presence of God is to be found, so not only is he greater than the greatest prophets, but he is actually the dwelling place of the Most High God.

This is not, therefore, a literal story about a real incident that actually took place. It was a way of describing Jesus in terms of well-known Jewish symbolism to convince and assure people that Jesus had a unique relationship with God, that Jesus spoke the words of God and, perhaps most importantly, that Jesus was a new phase in the history of the Jewish nation.

For us today, the story of the transfiguration may be little more than an interesting study in the symbolism of the Old Testament, but it does give us an insight into the way he was regarded by those who first wrote about him and who first organised a church in his name. And even though the way we interpret the stories about him and his words and deeds may have changed and indeed be ever changing, we can see in this story and others like it that our faith in him as the one through whom we can see God is a faith shared with those who first knew him. And it may also prompt us to realise again that the faith we profess is intimately connected with Judaism - for without some understanding of Jewish scripture and tradition we could never understand the message of stories such as this, nor the truth they portray - that in Jesus we see God.

HYMN 204

O vision blest of heavenly light,  
which meets the three disciples' sight,  
when on the holy mount they see  
their Lord's transfigured majesty.

More bright than day his raiment shone;  
the Father's voice proclaimed the Son  
belov'd before the worlds were made,  
for us in mortal flesh arrayed.

And with him there on either hand  
both Moses and Elijah stand,  
to show how Christ, to those who see,  
fulfils both law and prophecy.

O Light from light, by love inclined,  
Jesus, redeemer of mankind,  
accept thy people's prayer and praise  
which on the mount to thee they raise.

Be with us, Lord, as we descend  
to walk with thee to journey's end,  
that through thy cross we too may rise,  
and share thy life and claim the prize.

To thee, O Father; Christ, to thee,  
let praise and endless glory be,

whom with the Spirit we adore,  
one Lord, one God, for evermore.

Prayer:

It is a strange time of year, O God.  
We linger between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent.  
We are between the joy of your appearing  
and the horror of your undoing  
at the hands of those who would not or could not  
embrace your way of life.

Perhaps we - like Peter, James, and John -  
wait for your appearing in dazzling light and unmistakable clarity:  
We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus  
who is the way through the mix and mess of this life.

Our planet is fragile and so is the life that claims it as home.  
We wonder how long we can simply take what we want  
with little regard for what it costs your creation.  
We wonder if the planet is crying out for relief  
in the floods that are really tears;  
the earthquakes that try and shake our consciousness;  
the gales that blow sighs, too deep for words.

Renew and restore a vision of care for your creation.  
Remind us to take what we need and no more.  
Encourage us in a counter-cultural faithfulness  
that is not about consumerism.  
Spur us with new insight and deeper understanding  
that we may live mindfully each day,  
conscious of the impact of we do and fail to do.

We pray for the people of the world whose names we will never know,  
whose faces flash across the TV screen in anonymity born of numbers;  
those who bear the weight of earth's pain:

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the truth -  
the truth that love is stronger than hate;  
peace is possible;  
and life can emerge even in the midst of devastation.  
We pray for that truth to be known:

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the life;  
inviting us to follow in his footsteps  
as he trod the way of love and justice,  
inviting us to follow him in prayer  
as he lived out his faith  
and made You known.

We give thanks for the good news that unfolds in the world

as people dream your dreams, follow your nudging,  
and seek you in the faces they meet each day.  
Perhaps, O God, it is the only Transfiguration we really need.

For all those who are quiet witness to your love and way of life,  
we give thanks, O God.

Draw us into the season of Lent as it unfolds in our midst;  
a sacred invitation to explore the corners of our hearts.  
Open us to your light that we might see ourselves clearly,  
with all our fears and faults and faith,  
with all our desires and dreams and duties.  
Help us to see our journey as a place of your appearing -  
that like Peter, James, and John  
we may come down from the mountain  
and set one foot in front of the other  
in your name and for your sake. **Amen.**

#### Hymn 650

God with humanity made one  
is seen in Christ, God's only Son:  
in you, Lord Christ, the Son of Man,  
we see God's reconciling plan.

To save a broken world you came,  
and from chaotic depths reclaim  
your whole creation, so we share  
your reconciling work and care.

In you all humankind can see  
the people God would have us be.  
In you we find how God forgives,  
through you, the Spirit in us lives.

Through us God calls the world again;  
and constantly his love remains  
with arms outstretched, to heal and bless  
the refugees of emptiness.

Where race or creed or hate divide,  
the Church, like God, must stand beside  
and stretch out reconciling hands  
to join, through suffering, every land.

Then give us strength, great Lord of life,  
to work until all human strife  
is reconciled, and all shall praise  
your endless love, your glorious ways.

Benediction

In the coming week,  
may we experience the presence of God with joy.  
May the holy cloud comfort us.  
May the divine voice encourage us.  
May the power of the Spirit transform us,  
transform our world.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with each one of us, and with all those we love, today and for ever more.

Amen



