



GOSPEL GOSSIP

This is my Son, the Beloved

St Matthew 17. 1-9

Sunday 15 February

The Church of England gospel reading for this Sunday concerns the Transfiguration of Jesus. St Matthew tells us that Jesus went up to the top of a high mountain with his closest disciples, Peter, James and John, to pray. While he was there, he was 'transfigured', changed. The three disciples saw talking with the great Jewish patriarchs Moses and Elijah. They were clearly overwhelmed by what they saw, especially when a dazzling cloud enveloped them and a voice from heaven was heard proclaiming, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When this vision ended, the disciples were scared, but Jesus reassured them, and told them not to talk about until after...

After what? Jesus' ministry around Galilee had now come to an end. He had preached, taught, healed, performed miracles, cast out demons and attracted a large following. But this was not enough to show God's power and that Jesus was God's Son, sent to redeem all of their sins. The next and final stage was beginning. Jesus was even now looking towards Jerusalem, where he knew he was to be crucified, but also to rise again.

- Why should Jesus have to die?
- Was all his ministry in Galilee proof enough that he was God's Son?
- What was the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus in conversation?
- How would you react to such a sight?
- What would have been the effect on Jesus on the voice from the cloud?

It was common amongst pagans to worship their gods in 'high places'. Even Solomon, in all his wisdom, in old age was taken in by the pagan faith of his wives, and set up altars on high places to their Gods. A mountain top was as high as you could get on earth, and so therefore was the nearest you could get to God.

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him, not just to prove to them who he was, but also to strengthen them for what was to lie ahead – his crucifixion and death. The Father's words were also a reassurance to him; he was human after all and so would have experienced apprehension at the very least – who wouldn't? Yet those words heard by the disciples also apply to each of us. God owns every single one of us as his beloved child, on whom his favour rests, and encourages us in our work as Jesus' disciples today, empowered by baptism, to proclaim freedom to all.

- Where do you feel closest to God?
- Do you feel encouraged or fearful to think God's words apply to you?
- How do you go about following the practical example of Christ?
- Are you deterred by the fear of failure, or feel unworthy of your calling?
- How much are you prepared to lose for Jesus?

The following Sunday is the first in Lent, after Ash Wednesday on the 18th. During Lent we begin our journey with Jesus in the wilderness as he focuses on his ministry whose first stage in this passage has come to an end. In a sense it is a cross-road (pun intended) but one at which God gives guidance, reassurance and comfort to him. And he does the same for us.