

Good morning everyone. Welcome. It is wonderful to be here together.

This morning is a special Sunday in the Church calendar - does anyone know what it is?

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. It is the Sunday before Lent, the name we give the time that leads up to Easter.

Now you might be wondering. Well Andrew has been preaching about the kingdom of God. He hasn't mentioned that the series has finished, and now he is talking about Transfiguration Sunday so I wonder what the message will be on today...

Well today's message is on the transfiguration, and so if you are wondering about what that word means, you will find out later on, but it also integrates. dovetailing in with the series on the kingdom of God.

As I begin I will pray.

prayer

This morning's message comes from Luke chapter 9 verses 28 to 36. Today instead of reading the passage I will tell the story that is in the passage.

Jesus had been ministering for three years now. That is how long the disciples had been with him. And the disciples were starting to show glimpses of understand about who Jesus really was, that he wasn't just a prophet. That Jesus was actually the messiah, that he was the Christ.

But it was only glimpses of that - even after seeing everything that Jesus did and hearing all that Jesus said.

And then one day, Jesus said to three of his disciples, the three who were the closest to him, Peter, John and James. Come with me, I am going up that mountain over there to pray.

Well, I am sure that they would have wondered why they needed to do that, after all you can pray to God anywhere, but they didn't argue, they just followed Jesus up the mountain. Travelling, climbing, following him.

And so as the day drew to a close, Peter, John and James as well as Jesus were feeling really quite tired by the time they got there.

Climbing is tiring work. And as dusk came, Peter, John and James were really struggling to stay awake, praying was one of the last things on their minds. But Jesus was there, not far away and they could see Jesus praying. Not just saying a few words, but really deep in prayer, talking to God the father about things that were troubling him.

And as Peter, John and James looked on, they saw something that really woke them up, that made them shake off the tiredness that they were starting to feel. The way Jesus looked started to change before their very eyes, it was still Jesus, but there was something different about his face. His clothes became really dazzling white, almost as if light was coming off them. they couldn't believe what they were seeing. They had never seen anything like it before.

They knew what Jesus looked like, they had been with him for 3 years. They knew the clothes he was wearing, they had seen him wearing them for day after day. This was strange...

And then they saw something else happen as well, two men suddenly appeared out of nowhere and started talking to Jesus. Two men who hadn't climbed the mountain with them. Two men who were shining like Jesus was. And so Peter, James and John drew close to them.

Trying to work out who these men were and what they were all talking about. And as they did they heard words, they heard names, Moses, Elijah, that was who they were - so that was what they looked like, (*I thought Moses would have been a bit taller than that*), those prophets sent from God, that they read about, that they had heard about. And then Peter, James and John heard fragments of the conversation that Moses and Elijah were having with Jesus. The three of them were talking about Jerusalem and Jesus departing. What was that about? Well that would have to wait, since now, seeing what was in front of their eyes was amazing, seeing people shining in dazzling white. Seeing Jesus like that, and then seeing Elijah and Moses.

Just as Elijah and Moses looked like they were about to leave Jesus, Peter spoke up and said, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" Peter did not think it through, it just felt like a good thing to say, and so he said it. That was what Peter was like.

And before he had finished saying that, a cloud came and overshadowed them. And as the cloud came down, the disciples

were terrified. Then from the cloud came a voice, a voice saying,
“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

When the voice had finished, Moses and Elijah were gone. Jesus was alone with the disciples. And Peter, James and John decided to keep silent about what they saw, and they didn't tell anyone for quite a long time about what they had seen on top of that mountain.

That was the mountain top experience that we now call the transfiguration.

Now when we describe life we often use words like good times and bad, like ups and downs.

We talk about feeling low, or being down in the dumps if we feel sad. And then if we are cheerful, we talk about being on top of things, being in high spirits.

People talk about having a high, although sometimes that is an artificial one that is chemically assisted.

But there are also times when we do have a natural high. When we do feel like we are on top of things.

So highs and lows, mountains and valleys are part of the way that we describe how we are feeling.

And that real natural high when we feel on top of the world, well that is a mountain top experience.

Peter, James, John witnessed it. Peter stay here.

And in this story Peter, James and John witnessed firsthand the most amazing mountain top experience. They witnessed a glimpse of the kingdom of God that is to come. That saw Jesus transformed. Can you imagine the adrenaline rush that they would have had? It is just as well that there were three of them there together to witness it together, or they would have needed to pinch themselves to make sure that they were not dreaming.

It was something that was amazing and incredible.

And what followed, what Peter said was very natural. When we experience something that is amazing like that - well we want to preserve it. These days we might take a photograph or a video, something the disciples could not do.

Often we want that amazing experience to become normal, we want that to be what life is like all the time. That is what we want, and that is what the disciples wanted as well.

And that is why Peter said, Jesus it is so great being here, let's preserve it. Let's make three dwellings, three tabernacles one for Elijah, one for Moses and one for you. Three places for you to live. Now in case you are wondering, Peter was not talking about bivouacs here. He wasn't talking about tents that we might use if we go out camping for a night or two. Peter was talking about fully fledged mobile home style tents. The sort that people who were nomadic would live in, the sort that Abraham lived in. The sort of tents that people would be comfortable living in for years. The equivalent these days would be one of those top class luxury mobile homes.

Peter wanted to preserve what he was experiencing. He wanted this to be the new normal. He wanted to live on the mountain top, to experience a triumphant victorious life. He wanted to live in the complete fullness of the kingdom of God that is to come.

But that is not the way that God views mountains. They are not places for us to live. Our journey following Jesus might lead us up a mountain, but it will also lead us down the other side as well. Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, to the cross. That was his destination, the mountain top was an experience on the way to Jerusalem.

That is the way God views those mountain top experiences.

Why do I say that? Well think back to those people Moses and Elijah, who Jesus met on the mountain. What were their experiences of God and mountains? Since both of them had one of those mountain top experiences where they met God.

For Moses, the mountain was where he met God and God gave him the law. Moses went up the mountain and met with God for forty days and forty nights. God gave him the ten commandments.

When Moses came down from the mountain his face glowed because he had met with God. It was on the mountain top that God gave Moses the law, but it was because of what happened afterwards, when Moses went down from the mountain that the people of Israel entered the promised land. That was their destination. Not the mountain top.

For Elijah, the mountain of God was where he fled when he was scared for his life. It was on the mountain of God that he heard God's

still small voice. God's voice told him what his next steps were, God let him know that there were things he needed to do. Things that included going and finding Elisha, who would become Elijah's follower and ultimately his successor. The mountain was where Elijah heard God's voice, but God's plan for Elijah happened after he left the mountain.

For Moses and Elijah, the mountain was a place where they met with God, but it was also a place where they were empowered to do the tasks that God had set before them.

And that was the case for Jesus as well.

Right before this story, Jesus was talking to the disciples about the suffering and rejection that was going to happen to him. He told them that he was going to be killed before being raised from the dead. That was when Jesus said to them, if anyone wants to be my follower let them deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me.

The mountain top experience for Jesus was one where he was strengthened and empowered for what was going to come. For what Jesus was going to experience.

During his time on earth, Jesus became human, he could feel pain like we do. I don't know how he was feeling about what was to come, but it would be natural for there to be some kind of apprehension, both for himself and for what would happen to the disciples. There are clues about that in scripture.

Jesus needed to be strengthened and encouraged.

And that happened on that mountain top.

Mountain top experiences are great. They are wonderful and amazing. When you are high up you can see into the distance.

In our lives as followers of Jesus we need times like that. Times we can catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God that is to come.

It might not be good for us to go quite as high as the experience that Peter, James and John had. But after all, they were the only three of the disciples Jesus took with him. So it might be a little like real mountain climbing, where some people can get altitude sickness if they go too high.

But having times when we get a glimpse of who Jesus is, those times are wonderful.

But we can't live on the mountain top. They are not our destination, they are something that we experience on the way to our destination. Mountain top experiences are about empowering us, encouraging us preparing us for the things that God has in store for us.

When we go on a trip in a car we need to have petrol in the tank. It is a good feeling when you know you have enough petrol to get where you are going. Petrol stations are essential in helping us in our journey.

But if we spent all our time going from petrol station to petrol station, searching for ones that were bigger and had more shining lights. And that was all that we did, then having a car would be pointless.

And mountain top experiences are like petrol stations. They are helpful, they are useful, but they are not our destination as followers of Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus means climbing back down the mountain, it means denying ourselves, it means taking up our cross, it means following Jesus. And that means dealing with things that are not always pleasant. In the stories of Moses, Elijah and Jesus there were things that were really quite messy that they experienced straight after they came down the mountain. But they were able to handle those times because of their experience with God. That is why they had a mountain top experience.

And it is because God knows what is ahead of us, the things that we will experience, that he empowers us, that he encourages us, that is why we have mountain top experiences on the way to our destination.
let us pray...