

Group Notes 6 March 2011

Transfiguration

Welcome - Ice Breaker

What's the hardest day's work you have ever done?

Word - Sermon Summary: Matthew 17:1-9

This story happens just a few weeks before the Cross and Resurrection. In chapter 16 Jesus has just told the disciples that he is the Messiah and explained that this means he is doomed to suffer and die. The transfiguration takes place in the far north of Israel where there is a very high mountain range called Mount Hermon. From it Peter, James and John could see more or less the whole of Israel: everywhere they have grown up and lived and loved and worked is spread out at their feet, and most of what they knew of Jesus too. They can also see Jerusalem in the far distance.

Trace Jesus movements from here on and you find that He heads south – straight to Jerusalem and to the Cross. This is the final sprint to the finish line where He will have to give everything He's got. His earthly ministry among a few thousand people in Galilee is about to transit into a cosmic ministry that will redeem the whole earth. He's got to find the resources to face the terrible suffering ahead.

So Jesus turns to His Father. He receives:-

- the shining glory of His Father's presence (the shining cloud figures in the Old Testament as the visible presence of God)
- the affirmation of His Father's love – "This is my beloved!"
- His status as the royal Son
- A manifestation of the future glory that will be His after God's purposes have worked out

So Jesus sees his coming trial, not just from the perspective of a hilltop, but from a heavenly perspective – from the way God sees it.

We also need God's perspective to face whatever life with its many challenges holds in store for us. The perspective of heaven is a vital perspective for coping with life. Worship is the ideal means for restoring this perspective to us – we need to take in the vastness of God's majesty, greatness and love.

- So let's not be like Peter (v.4) – full of words, desperate to put his own spin on what God was doing and take control of the illimitable mystery.
- Let's not be like Peter, wanting to just do, do, do all the time – "let's build a nice little house for you Jesus, and one for Moses and Elijah too". As if Christianity is all about what we do, not about what God does.
- Let's not be like Peter wanting to have a safe God we can keep in a little box. Is that your view of Jesus? A pet you can keep in his hutch and bring out to play with on Sundays?

Let's give God our full attention! Look at His glory, listen to what He has to say, enter fully into His presence and receive His endless love. That's where the power will come from, for our daily lives and the challenges we face! He is in charge of everything that will happen to us today.

Word 2 - Discussion Questions:-

- The disciples had known Jesus for quite a while before the transfiguration. Do you think they could have got a bit too used to Him? Taken Him for granted, even?
 - Do we sometimes get a bit stale as Christians and start taking Jesus for granted?
- In verse 4, does Peter actually have anything worthwhile to say? What do you think makes him break in so rudely on this sublime sharing between Jesus and his Father?
 - Is Christianity too wordy? Are we frightened sometimes just to be with the Lord?
 - What things drive us to keep talking in prayer even when we have little to say?
- In the same way, Peter is desperate for something to do – "Let's build you a house Lord!" How do we tell worthwhile Christian service from pointless hyperactivity?
- What's going on when Peter wants to build little shrines, one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah?
 - In what ways do we try to put God in a box in Christian circles today?
 - Why do we do it?
- Can you describe a worship time that brought you into a really meaningful encounter with the Lord? Can you say what made it so powerful?
- What would you say to people who think that worship is escapism? Or a waste of time? Or a form of Christian entertainment?

Worship Ideas

Play some suitable music. Ask everyone to close their eyes and invite Jesus to lead them on a journey up on to a hill top – a real or imaginary hilltop that overlooks a really significant place in their lives. Give people time to follow Jesus to the top of the hill. When they are ready, invite the Lord to meet with everyone on the summit. Give people time to bask in His presence and receive His love. Then ask them to look down from the hilltop over their lives spread out below. What looks different now? What might the Lord want to change? How might He want to equip us to deal with our challenges?