

Sermon on Mark 9: 2-9

The Hiddenness of Glory

Focus Sentence: God's glory is hidden to us, even in the revelation of Jesus the Son God's light remains mysterious, yet we look and listen to Jesus whom God illuminates before us.

So much of life remains hidden to us, like tree roots below the ground.

Beyond our sight and knowing.

We live our lives day to day amid the normal routines and often assume we're seeing most of what's going on.

Yet beneath the surface there's a vast network of meanings and associations which inform who we are and perhaps are as elusive to us as anything.

We remain a mystery to each other, our family our friends, but hidden to ourselves especially.

Let alone seeing into the depths of God, we struggle even to know ourselves.

The good I wish to do, I do not do, St Paul says ruefully, and the evil I wish not to do, I do.

Imprisoned for his part in the plot to kill Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor, theologian, Christian, asked, 'Who am I? Am I really that which others tell of me?'

He struggled to be so certain about his own life and identity as those around him seemed to be.

He finished his famous poem with the only truth he *was* certain about, 'Whoever I am, dear Lord, you know I'm Thine.'

This time of year it's fascinating to watch the parents dropping off their children to school for the first time.

It really is a primordial relational moment when everything changes.

The parents quite often become teary and emotional.

Time has passed and is passing.

And this little child that was a baby five minutes ago is suddenly for the first time stepping into another world beyond the immediate protection of home.

Separation, anxiety, fear, mixed with excitement, anticipation and hope.

All manner of pitfalls are imagined to exist beyond the fabled threshold of the kindergarten doorway.

What will become of them?, the parents ask themselves nervously.

The wise teacher reassures, 'They'll be okay, trust me.'

And takes them under her care.

Overcome, we have an inkling that something of the mystery of what it means to be human, to love and be loved, has risen to the surface.

And if we are attentive to this, we wonder from whence this feeling has come; what it means, and what it says about who we are, this moment of revelation rising amid intermingled tears and joy.

Jesus takes three of his disciples up a mountain and the hiddenness of God's own glory is disclosed briefly as he is transfigured before them.

The veil is torn back between heaven and earth for a moment as the dazzling brightness of eternity illuminates Jesus.

We might imagine this to be a reassuring thing.

Look at this divine display of heavenly radiance, like an unforgettable sunset.

What a sight! What a truth!

But the disciples are terrified – cloud, light, mysterious heavenly appearances and voices.

It overshadows and overwhelms them.

Casting around anxiously for something to say, Peter, as usual, puts his foot in it.

The others appear not to say a word.

That might be the best policy.

Silence before the awesome sight of their transfigured Lord.

Silence before the glory which rocks them back on their heels, even while the light, the voice, the command to listen to the beloved Son all seem to confirm their now growing sense of who Jesus really is.

God's remoteness is brought close to them, and as Moses, Elijah, Hannah, Mary, and others before them had found, it is unsettling and bewildering.

The glory, even as it is revealed, remains hidden in a cloud of unknowing.

Maybe, though, for us as it was for the disciples, the shock and awe of the glory of God should not hide the most obvious thing.

The hidden mystery of eternity illuminates a human face, transfigures a human being.

Only verses ago in the Gospel story Jesus spoke of his approaching suffering and death, one of the most defining factors of what it means to be human.

There is a time to be born and a time to die.

The one who will die, is here the one covered, transfigured in the glory of God.

It foretells the resurrection itself so aptly that some scholars have contended that this is actually a resurrection story brought back in the timeline as a preview of what is to come.

Whatever the case the contours of the human face that is glorified, are not mysterious, they are ours.

Could it be that as an ordinary human face is transfigured up the mountain, it might be our ordinary human lives that are illuminated by God's glory?

If we have eyes to see amid the mystery of our humanity?

That we might be transfigured in those moments when perhaps unexpectedly, some sense of the deeper truth of our being washes over us?

Like the parents at the school gate when a radiant longing can't be held back from their outward expression?

From their tears? It's there for all to see.

And that to observe this is in fact somehow mysteriously a blessing to be received?

That it somehow conveys the love of God, which in Jesus wears a human face?

Who speaks such that we *can understand* something?

Who loves that we *can know*, for all our fragilities, that this love brings us home and makes us whole?

If we have eyes to see?

The Irish poet WB Yeats wrote of a moment he experienced in a London coffee shop:

*My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.
While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.*

That I was blessed and could bless.

Perhaps this is the greatest miracle.

Transfiguration, the holy and the human forged together, mysterious, unsettling, even terrifying at times, may still prove a blessing... to us, and to others.

That I was blessed and could bless.

This is God's grace and God's glory all wrapped up in one.

And the fact that even as so much of the glory remains hidden – hidden in unexpected places, lives, experiences, hidden even from our own comprehension much of the time...

... that it is still revealed to us, even that we can be blessed and have our own lives illuminated, ... well, this shows us just how amazing it is. Amen.