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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : February 14th, 2021
“Sunday before Lent”

SUNDAY BEFORE LENT 2021

Of all the events in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Transfiguration has always been one of my favourites. It may be because visiting the Mount of the Transfiguration in the Holy Land is a breath-taking experience. There is a long, tortuous journey by taxi (no room for coaches) up the long, winding, dusty road – but the view from the top is simply amazing – glorious, even! You really do feel close to the glory of God on Mount Tabor.

Yet GLORY is a strange word and can mean different things in different contexts to different people. What do we mean when we describe something as GLORIOUS, as full of glory? It’s a word that evokes magnificence, great beauty – the building, we say, has been restored to its former glory; the garden has been transformed by glorious new planting and so on. For Christians, the word GLORY is particularly associated with the praise, worship and thanksgiving offered to God. At the end of a Psalm, we sing the Gloria – Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. ‘Changed from glory into glory’ is a phrase we sing in one of the most popular hymns – ‘Love divine’ which we’re going to sing at the end of the service today. It’s a striking phrase which means that God is able to change us, to transform, transfigure us into the sort of people he wants us to be – so long as we can be trusting and child-like enough to allow him to do that. And God does that because he loves us –

and Valentine's Day is a very good day for us to remember that God loves us, you and me!

So, I wonder – I wonder when you last thought of something you experienced as being glorious? Things sometimes have a habit of moving us when we least expect it. A sunset. A person's kindness. A piece of music. For many of us it was the recent snow fall which, even for a short while, transformed our surroundings into a thing of real white beauty. There are so many ordinary things which can move us to feel a glorious moment, experiences that give us a glimpse of glory.

I had one such moment recently. Years ago, I was lucky enough to see the musical 'Billy Elliott' live on stage – and recently the stage show was reshowed on television. You'll probably know the story of the miner's son, living in Easington in County Durham during the Miner's strike of 1984 who discovers a gift for dance. It's a wonderful production – but there is one moment that is literally out of this world. Amidst the grime and hardship of 1980's Britain, Billy dances in his imagination – and is, on stage, literally lifted by a high wire to sweep and swirl and dance in the air – before coming down to earth and back to the grim reality of his life. **That** was glory – something that takes us out of the mundane and shows us a glimpse of glory.

It is significant that the theme of GLORY is always chosen for the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. For after the celebration of Christmas, we move to our penitential season as we enter the wilderness for 40 days – marking it as a season of awareness of our human frailty, awareness of God's love and grace and awareness of our dependence upon him for everything. For many, Lent is a time when we pause to take stock of our lives, to assess whether we are actually going in the right direction, the direction God has mapped out for us.

So, this Lent, let's try to open our eyes to glimpse God's glory, to allow ourselves to be changed from glory to glory – for we may be surprised to discover that, as we try to live our lives close to Jesus of Nazareth, listening to his quiet voice

guiding us, talking over our problems and happiness with him, and working at living a good life, then gradually our faces will start to show some of God's glory, and our lives will start to shine, reflecting God's loving nature.

We cannot spend time regularly in God's company and work at living his way without it changing us and making us beautiful. But Jesus always presents us with the challenge – as he challenged the disciples with the question: 'who do you say I am?' What we reply has a lot to do with recognising the glory shown in the Transfiguration, and that will affect how we decide to live our lives with Christ – starting from now.