

Moments of Transformation for Jesus, Peter and Us

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, February 12th, 2023 - Matt 17:1-9 & 2 Peter 1:16-21)

We see nature transforming before our very eyes. The seasons move from summer to autumn to winter and to spring. Our trees have fruited and soon will lose their leaves and prepare themselves for next year's harvest. The days are now starting to shorten. Caterpillars change and before we know it, they will become butterflies. Such transformation happens in our children as they grow taller, as they gain confidence, as they begin kinder and school. They start to hold more complicated thoughts and begin to articulate them. Hopefully we as adults continue to transform too as we recognize what is important in life and as we begin to reflect more deeply.

The artist is continually transforming as he or she takes paint from the palette and transforms into a work of beauty, or a potter takes the clay and transforms it into a vessel of some kind, an embroiderer takes a thread and weaves it through the canvas until it too is a work of beauty.

Nature and art and ourselves transforming before our very eyes.

Before the disciples very eyes, Jesus is transformed. Jesus takes three of his group of disciples up a mountaintop and there before their eyes he is transfigured and meets with two of the great men of the Jewish faith – Moses and Elijah. They hear God's voice from a cloud imploring them to listen to Jesus who is the beloved son. No doubt in their experience this was a highlight, but it is over almost as soon as it began and Jesus leads them down the mountain telling them to keep it all a secret.

So here they are on a mountain, usually the place Jesus goes to pray. In Scripture the mountain top is significant, it is the place of revelation, of instruction and hope, after all it is where Moses received the law.

Then we have two important figures from the past Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus – Moses represents the law and Elijah the prophets and it is the law and the prophets which Jesus has come to fulfill.

Then there is Jesus shining like the sun dressed in dazzling clothes.

I guess that Peter and the others could hardly believe what they were seeing, they would have rubbed their eyes to see if it was real or just their imaginations. Peter, who can't help himself recognises this as a significant moment, and wants to capture it, to mark it somehow, so he suggests they make three dwellings one for each, but before he can go much further he is interrupted, interrupted by God. Out from a cloud which now covers the scene the disciple's hear the voice of God uttering the same words he did at Jesus' baptism – this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him.

Then in an instant everything is back to normal, just the three of them and Jesus. Or is everything back to normal?

This experience has deeply affected the three disciples and they are on the ground overcome with fear. Or are they overcome with awe?

What happens next I think reveals just as much about Jesus as the actual transformation. Jesus touches them, asks them to get up and comforts them by saying don't be afraid. How often have we heard and seen Jesus do that – extending his hand and telling people not to be afraid.

Cryptically they go down the mountain and are told not to tell anyone about the experience, that is until Jesus has risen from the dead. What a lot to take in – experiencing something amazing and then being told to keep it secret.

I think Peter and probably the other disciples were transfigured that day – they were changed. In our other reading from the second letter of Peter, the writer reminds the listeners that the message that Peter had taught had authority because he had seen the majesty of Jesus, he was present at the transfiguration and he heard the voice of God – what did that voice say – Listen to him.

Peter is one of the disciples we know most about. Jesus called him Cephas – the rock. He whilst impetuous, really did try and live out his new found faith – he walks on the water but begins to sink and what happens – Jesus again extends his hand out to help him. Like all of the disciples he is both puzzled by and devoted to Jesus. He names Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah. He can't face the fact that this amazing man who had turned his life around from a rough and ready fisherman to a follower of the way was going to leave them all. We know that he will deny Jesus and feel so deeply ashamed by that, and then again Jesus will come to him and forgive him. He fails often, but each time Jesus lifts him up. He does end up an important person in the early church, he had been transformed again and again. Eventually he has learnt to do as the voice of God had told him, listen to him.

Are we like Peter? Have we had an amazing experience of God in our lives? Do we try our best but sometimes get it very wrong? Do we have moments of great insight? Do we have moments of denial? Are we puzzled by what God is doing in our lives? Do we want to recapture those moments of seeing God in his majesty?

Are we open to being transformed or transfigured by God in the same way? Might we hear the voice of God reminding us to listen to him. Might God's voice interrupt all our crazy plans to say listen. And when we are confused and puzzled might we hear Jesus saying to us – don't be afraid. When we stumble might we feel the gentle embrace of Jesus as he lifts us up and encourages us to go down the mountain and follow him. Then too will we be transformed by our encounter with Jesus, the transfigured one.