

Sermon – 14th February 2021 - The Transfiguration of Jesus

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May my words be true to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

From a very young age my Dad always encouraged us: my twin sister Ange, our brother Pete, and myself to read, and it's something I have loved to do ever since. Some books made a huge impression on me and one of them was a book written by Eleanor Porter which was about a young girl called Pollyanna. Pollyanna went to live with her bad tempered aunt after her father died, and things were not good at home. However, Pollyanna's happy optimistic nature proved to have an astonishing effect on all around her and the story was a wonderful one of how cheerfulness and light can conquer adversity and darkness.

Pollyanna's outlook on life centres on what she called '*The Glad Game*', an optimistic attitude she learned from her father. The game consisted of finding something to be glad about in every situation. It's an incident one Christmas when Pollyanna, who was hoping for a doll, found only a pair of crutches in a lucky dip missionary barrel. Making the game up on the spot, Pollyanna's father taught her to look on the bright side of things – in this case, to be glad about the crutches because "we didn't need to use them!" With this philosophy and her sunny personality and sincere, sympathetic attitude, Pollyanna brings so much gladness to her aunt's town that she transforms it, or possibly even transfigures it into a happier place to live. The book shines with the girl's happy personality as one miserable person after another is transformed. No one is immune for long. Soon the whole town begins to shine with kindness, hopefulness and love.

As a challenge to Christians, and all people whether they have faith or not, it is a simple but profound one. From your face, the way you look, as well as your mouth, the things you say, the way you think, would people see enough of the loving kindness to show straightaway that you were a person of faith, a person of warmth, a person transfigured by love? The kind of genuine, shining goodness that glows from someone that is a sign of their warmest being, their caring heart, their generous mind shining out of them even when they are not aware of it.

In our Gospel reading from Saint Mark Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him up the mountain and begins to pray to God and before his inner circle of close friends he began to shine. The dazzling brightness was so intense that it shone out of Jesus. It is a transfiguration by the presence of God's light. He is standing between Moses and Elijah, those two giants from the past – the great lawgiver and the great representative of the prophets – and our Lord is revealed as the living fulfilment of them both. Overshadowing all of them is the presence of the Father, whose voice is telling them all that He was well pleased with his beloved Son. This is the moment when God makes it clear after all the uncertainty about who Jesus was is now made clear, even for the most fleeting of moments, and in that time Jesus shone.

Good people, kind people, generous people, gracious people shine from within, and it attracts rather than repels. When we are glad, when we have found reasons, even in the face of terrible difficulty or adversity – to be glad – then our face, our whole bodies, change. We become positive, we become clear-sighted and we become more focused. We become more hopeful. We shine.

The story of transfiguration is God's ultimate pledge and commitment to the resurrection. God's promise that however dark the road, we walk through the clouds, to light and life.

Moments of transfiguration come to us in the everyday lives more than we realise. Times when we may not be able to find the words but we're aware that something tremendously important is happening. Moments of transfiguration may not happen for long, but they happen again and again through our lives, reminding us that the world is full of resilient meaning. Filled with a purpose and a brightness, that doesn't come from us but comes from God. And we see the reflection, and if we are open and faithful, we are transformed too.

The point of transfiguration is not only to reveal who and what Jesus is, but also to reveal who and what we might be too – in response to Him. When the light changes, when the words are heard, when our eyes are opened, we see not only the real Christ, but also, in his reflected light, our own lives, our own potential and our own possibilities.

It's not only a vision of Christ transfigured that we need. It is also a vision of the Church transfigured that we need, and the people of the church transfigured. Seen in the light of Christ, we shall see what we should be and could be. Our real selves, our better selves, affirmed and affirming, beautiful, shining, helpful and hopeful.

The transfiguration of the people of Christ would revolutionise not only the Church, but also the world – and it would be contagious. Radiating its warm light and helping others to be transformed too.

Perhaps Pollyanna was right, playing the 'glad game' of faith allows the transforming and healing light of Jesus Christ to shine through into all the places of hurt and hopelessness and showing that the light will come and that it will make a difference for good.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.