

Transfiguration Sunday

Sermon Text – 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Theme: We shine the light of Christ

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Transfiguration Sunday is one of my favourite days of the year. It wasn't always that way as it didn't seem to make too much sense that Jesus appearing to a select few in really shiny clothes was really that important. But the beauty of the Transfiguration is that we, through the eyes of Peter, James and John gain a glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ who is so much more than just a good leader, or a wise teacher, or a good example of how we should live our lives.

It is this brilliant glimpse of Jesus' glory that we are called to shine into this dark and broken world today.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

The Hidden Gospel

The sermon text for today is the New Testament reading in which St Paul doesn't mince his words when he points out that for those people who are perishing, for those people who don't put their faith and trust and hope in the Triune God, the gospel message is veiled. That is, even though it may be put in front of their noses, for those who are perishing, they are blinded to God's glory and the gift of his eternal life.

Perhaps if you have been to a funeral service in which there is no religious involvement, you'll understand how hopeless and uncertain everything seems to be. Even if the funeral director speaks nice words, without Christ's death *and resurrection* to stand behind these words, there is a sense of hollowness. It also most feels as though someone should declare, "Well that's it then. That's as good as it gets."

Unfortunately, for many people trying to pick up the pieces of their lives following floods, fires, droughts, or indeed any calamity that causes personal devastation, they will see only the problem and will be blind to God's presence in the midst of their suffering. In the immediate aftermath to the Victorian fires, so many people talked about how thankful they were that they were at least alive and that they still had loved ones around them. But now that the smoke has started to clear and people are being allowed back to their properties, the enormity of the devastation becomes more apparent. Suddenly people aren't quite so confident anymore and people may begin to despair. In Queensland communities where flood waters are beginning to recede, people can assess the level of damage and loss and in many cases it is everything.

Thankfulness begins to give way to depression and frustration and the initial confidence soon wanes. For so many people they begin to tally up the loss of worldly possessions and then the gods of this world hide the true God who brings eternal salvation to all people regardless of our circumstances. How will they begin to replace a lifetime of accumulation? How will they begin to replace a lifetime of memories captured in photos and other mementoes? The answer is that in many cases, you can't. All of those things have been destroyed and all this does is serve to remind us of how fleeting the *things* of this life can be.

The light of God shines into the darkness

The circumstances so many people find themselves in now that the smoke has cleared and the waters are receding must be very hard to bear. There have been and there will be many dark days ahead when there seems to be little hope. And yet into the darkness shines the light of Christ which we often see at times like this as *hope*. This hope does not come by accident but is a graceful gift from God. Paul writing to the Thessalonians says, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and *good hope through grace*, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." (2 Thess 2:16-17) God brings comfort and a sense of joy even in the midst of our most trying times.

What might God's comfort look like to those who have lost everything? Doesn't it look like neighbours helping to rescue one another during the crisis? How many times did we hear of friends battling flames, smoke or floods to save a neighbour? Isn't it the firefighters, emergency service and defence force personnel who risk their lives to do what they can for others in harms way? What about a community supporting those who have lost so much? Or maybe it would look like a nation getting behind whole towns

and a state to collectively say, “We care about you and we’re here to help in whatever way we can.” This is what God’s comfort looks like in the midst of suffering. This is the light of Christ shining into the darkest hours of communities and families. And it doesn’t need to be tragedy of a national scale for Christ to shine for you.

Now some might say that this is just the Australian way of doing things. Indeed many people who have given so much of themselves who never recognise what they have done as being ‘Christian’. But this doesn’t happen by accident. It is people responding to God’s law which is written on their hearts (Jer 31:33). In so many ways God works in our daily lives to show that he cares about us and he doesn’t leave us alone in our worries. He is working through the surgeon’s hands, through the teacher at school, through the friend who sits down to have a cuppa.

We are called to shine God’s love in the world

On this Transfiguration Sunday we as faithful Christians are once more given a glimpse of Christ’s glory which shone in brilliance all around Peter, James and John. Even though they didn’t understand its significance at first, it was a small foretaste of Christ’s glory being revealed for all people. From the opportunities that new beginnings brings, to settling into the endurance race of life, we are given markers to encourage us along the way. The Transfiguration is one such marker that reminds us of Jesus’ glory and his divinity.

Our congregational and parish AGMs were held last week. Even though many people struggle to see the value in such meetings, they ensure we are working as one in who we are in Christ in this community. So it was good to have many people attend the meeting to support the work of the Church Council and to vote on the various questions put to the meeting.

One of the decisions made was to adopt a new mission statement. It now reads: *We are called by God to shine the light of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through His Word into the time and place God has placed us.* In this mission statement we are given permission and a reason to serve others. Not that this comes from the statement, but rather through the Word of God. All the mission statement does is focus our attention on who we are (called by God); what we do (shine the light of Christ); and how we do it (by the power of the Holy Spirit). We don’t exist or serve in a vacuum, but into the time and place that God has put us, which happens to be here in Cairns in 2009. Don’t worry about what God might be calling you to do at some time in the future – he’s already given you something to do and it’s right here and now.

There must have been times of great darkness as Jesus led his disciples through Biblical Israel as he taught them and brought His saving grace to the world. How many times must they have thought the situation was hopeless as they battled people’s doubts and fought against their ridicule. At times it must have seemed as those they were at the very edge of despair. What a shining ray of hope Jesus’ transfiguration must have provided for his disciples. A ray of brilliant, heavenly light into the darkness of doubt and uncertainty.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, we are given this same ray of Jesus’ glorious light to shine into the darkness and challenges of this world. Many of you have already given generously to the various appeals to support the survivors of floods and fires. You have prayed for God’s mercy and compassion to be with those who are suffering. As you have done so for these people, keep praying for those in need in our community and around the world today. Keep loving others with Christ’s love, showing compassion to those in need, even those whom you find unlovely.

It’s this transfiguration light of Christ which you shine into the time and place God has put you. And you do this because God has called you to be his child whom he has put into the world. And you do shine Christ’s light, not by your power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit who works in and through you.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds as you shine the light of Christ Jesus. Amen.