

Transfiguration – 6 March

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

PRAYER

Trish tell - Story of Camp Pelican sunrise and sea gull - And the sense of the glory of God

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This was a small experience of the glory of God compared to the descriptions in the Bible today and yet I couldn't keep my eyes off it.

Exodus 24:15-16 *"When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mt Sinai."*

Exod 24:17 *"To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain."*

Matthew 17: *"There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light"*

Where the Presence of God is - the glory of God is.

Where the glory is the place becomes holy. I haven't been up Mt Sinai but I have been up Mt Carmel and I sat in a quiet spot there and I can tell you it still had a feeling of being a holy mountain, thousands of years later. I have been in churches – big and little where God's presence has clearly been at least at some stage of their life and it can still be felt.

Where God's glory is even ordinary things like clothing glows with the glory.

How would we describe the glory of God?

The Israelites described it as a consuming fire. But it is much more.

The description of the Transfiguration gives us some idea of God being so holy, so other, so transcendent, so awesome that even the sound of the Father's voice has the chosen disciples fall on their faces – with a profound fear of the Lord.

In God's presence we don't watch the little birds – whatever they represent, either the good things of this world or the troubles of this world.

The readings give us a glimpse of just how beyond,
How holy,
How high and lifted up God is.

The more we get to know God the more we realise how He is so righteous and we can't be near Him without being righteous ourselves. The people I know who are close to God are profoundly aware of their own sinfulness, own unrighteousness.

If we read further in 2 Peter there are strong words about being careful not to live unrighteous lives and that those who do - will face God's judgment. Chap 2: 7-8 *And if He rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, lived among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard).*

There is an insight here: that when one is righteous one is affected and distressed by unrighteous behaviour. There is a sensitivity.

In applying our teaching about righteousness to our lives, I ask the question: are we distressed, even tormented by the unrighteous behaviour of our society, or the laws being passed at times, such as one currently being debated on euthanasia, and another around the very nature of marriage?

Do we stay silent and reach overload and no longer get bothered by bad language and immoral behaviour and extreme violence in the movies, TV shows or amongst our friendships?

Do we think it is more important to be tolerant and accepted by our social set than living in full integrity to God's commandments and standards?

All who seek unrighteous ways, unchecked behaviours, have a consequence – our choices to sin or rebel from God's ways puts a barrier up in our hearts to God like a wall closing up and without repentance willingly from us – sin becomes a choice to separate ourselves from God.

One of the reasons the church has a confession as part of the Last Rites when someone is dying comes from the knowledge that we can act unrighteously, hence easily creating a barrier between God and us. So we are given a chance to clear up any wrong doing, by repenting and then accepting God's forgiveness for our sins. A daily confession is a good idea for each of us. As we head into the penitential season of Lent let us examine our conscience more consciously.

For we have this holy, pure glorious God on one hand and we have humans who can tend to unrighteous thoughts, words or behaviours on the other.

Then we have this free gift of righteousness from Jesus.

Funny thing too – unless we stay aware of the free gift we have of this righteousness we can take it for granted and start to desire and do things that are

not right by God's standards. We slip, and once on a slippery slope can get far away without realising.

We can find ourselves seeking earthly gains instead of seeking God's righteousness, we can find ourselves seeking a 'oh just leave me alone type of peace' instead of God's peace that passes understanding. It is possible to seek a 'satisfaction' of gossip, of stealing someone's reputation, instead of the Commandment of not giving false testimony against our neighbour. It is possible to slip onto immoral ways of thinking and living rather than holy ways, rather than goodness.

Hebrews 12:14 says: "*make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*"

God loves us so much He really wants us to see the importance of seeking righteousness and living holy lives. He knows that without that being our standard we have no chance of being close to Him.

God has given us ways through His Word, and His Spirit living within, to help us know and value His standards so that we can make right choices every day, moment by moment, step by step.

For the psalmist reminds us: *who may ascend the hill of the Lord (Ps 24) or who may dwell in God's sanctuary? One whose walk is blameless, who does what is right, who speaks truth from the heart, who does not slander, nor wrong a neighbour, who keeps a word given even when it hurts, who lends to those in need and who does not accept a bribe. (Ps 15)*

There many reminders of righteous behaviours in the Bible – it is so important to know them.

We are encouraged to be wise in our responses to our glorious, righteous God.
 1 Peter 1:19 "*And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and **you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.***"
you will do well to pay attention to it

Matthew 17:5 "*While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. **Listen to Him!***"
Listen to Him

Pay attention,
 Listen to Jesus.

And another simple way to get into the swing of righteousness is to fix our eyes on Jesus, on His glory, and seek Him and His righteousness and everything else pales away – like the little common seagull did in the story I began with.

I'm going to invite us to sing "Turn your eyes on Jesus" two times as an individual prayer. Then I ask you to hum it while I pray – and as you do that I invite you to receive the prayer. Receive afresh the gift of righteousness, treasure it and seek it more and more.

SONG: Turn your eyes on Jesus