

The last Sunday after Epiphany – Transfiguration 2021

Along with the clergy of the diocese I attended the annual one day clergy conference during the week. I always come away from such gatherings comforted and challenged in equal measure. On one hand I am heartened by the fact that I share in ministry with many others. But on the other hand I'm edgy, I hear language that is unfamiliar, ways of ministry that I don't do well or understand. But I was pleased that in the midst of the inevitable discussions about growing our Church one of the speakers spoke of our prayer life and called on us to consider our vocation of contemplation.

One model of prayer was considered which was described as being 'for God' and goes something like this: what are our needs? What project should we embark on in light of these needs? What about our organisation, who can do this? And then we pray 'Almighty God we do this *for* your greater glory!' Our speaker asked us to think again! We are asked to consider a model described as 'of God.' We began with prayer in which we said 'yes' to God, and we lived a Eucharistic spirituality, in praise, adoration and thanks. From there we gathered a community, and we involved ourselves in discovering God's scenario and from there God's mission. Because what we do is 'of God.' It is perhaps a reminder to us that the Church does not have a mission. God has a mission and the mission has a Church.

I say this to you because next week we will gather once again for another AGM. The reports have been distributed and I hope many of you will have had the opportunity to read them. They look back over the year, a challenging one, and they rehearse how we managed to deal with the circumstances in which we found ourselves. In writing my report I wondered about where to from here and I soon found myself in the 'for God' mode. I have written many rector's reports and many plans have been rather like New Year's resolutions soon lost in the reality of life and keeping faith in difficult and changing circumstances. Our calling is to ensure that all that we do is 'of God' the problem is that that is not always clear, let alone able to be clearly outlined in a brief report.

The fact is, as last year showed us, you don't know what's going to hit you next and it rather puts into perspective all those plans that the clergy and church leaders church tend to spend time on. We've all heard them, I've made them: 'this is what I've got to offer to the church, here is my great list of contributions I am going to make to the revival and the health of the parish.' I'm sure as a candidate for ordination, like all my peers, I had a ten point plan for re-creation of Christendom!

St Paul reminds us today that we are to be 'of God.' Our calling, is to serve; as Paul says, we are to be slaves to one another. We carry the crucified God around, we don't know what God will ask of us and what we will ask of each other. I can't say I fully understand the conversation between Elijah and Elisha this morning but clearly Elijah was not sure he could give what Elisha felt he needed, can any of us? Paul again tells us that 'we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.' We don't know how God will work through us (and at times in spite of us), but we believe it will happen, and we should be expectant that it will happen in ways that are both difficult, but also exciting, exhilarating even! We cannot do this for God, because more often than not we don't know where God is calling us. There is a distance between what we think we might have to give and what we think our gifts might be and what we think God will ask of us and the mysterious and surprising things that God actually does with us and through us. It is presumptuous to say I am doing this 'for God' but we can strive do it 'of God'; we can be thankful participants in God's life, come what may, and this in part, is what the Transfiguration is all about.

Jesus had warned his disciples about what was to come. They had been together on the road to Caesarea Philippi, it had been devastating for Peter and for the group collectively. Jesus had predicted his arrest and execution he tells that they too must take up their crosses and follow him and then he takes the 'in group' up the mountain and he surprises them. By this midpoint in the gospel the disciples were getting a bit of the message of who he was and they were beginning to think, with mounting panic probably, that he was going to ask quite a lot of them. And suddenly the skies opened and a light brighter than the noonday sun shines upon them, and they are very frightened. But Peter realises, albeit partially, that this is the most wonderful thing, we can't blame him given what has just happened on the road. He wants to hang on to the moment and we do too! He wants to do something 'for God'. But is it 'of God'?

The great surprise of Jesus' glory, laid bare on the mountaintop is also for us a promise. St John wrote in his first letter 'we don't know what *we shall be*' in the Transfiguration we get a glimpse. It keeps us going, but we don't know what Jesus will *do with us*. The surprise of the Transfigured Jesus is both terrifying and beautiful, it is call to serve, to take up our crosses *with confidence*. It is a call to live not 'for God' but 'of God' it is a call to trust in difficult and challenging times.

We may have plans 'for God,' but God's plans for us are greater than anything we can possibly imagine, if we are 'of God.' 'Tis good Lord that we are here. Amen.