

Transfiguration 2022

Exodus 34:29-35. 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2. Luke 9:28-36

We will soon be entering in to the journey of Lent. A useful time. Perhaps a time when we consider the commitments and promises we have made and how we have kept them. During Holy Week the clergy will be called to stand before the bishop and reaffirm their ordination vows. I am reminded of the vow I made to take part in 'the life and councils of the Church.' Let's say I'm not fond of meetings!

The Youth Group have recently embarked on a project to discuss the parables of Jesus and what they might mean for us today. Last Friday we looked at the parable of the great feast in Luke's gospel. In this parable a whole group of folk were invited to the a great banquet but when the day came there were numerous excuses, I'm just going to look at the new property I have acquired, I need to examine the yoke of oxen I have just bought, I have just got married I need to see my wife.

My immediate response to this parable was that it's as if Jesus has just invited the community to the Parish AGM, or the Synod of the Diocese. Now I'm not likening our AGM to the Kingdom of God – which is the great banquet or the wedding feast, but I am suggesting that for us in this Anglican tradition for the Kingdom to be made a reality the AGM is all part of the journey.

The Parish Council and the AGM, the Synods of the Church are not problem solving bodies. It is true that they do, from time to time, the Parish Council has to sort out the problem of the drains or the gardens but that is not its primary role, its *raison d'être*. In chapter nine of Luke's gospel we are on a journey and Peter plays a prominent role. He is portrayed as the problem solver: 'Who do you say that I am' asks Jesus; 'you are the Messiah' says Peter, which is correct – box ticked, but Peter needs to remain on the journey with Jesus to understand what that means. Later in the very same chapter he goes with Jesus and the inner circle to the Mount of Transfiguration and once again thinks he has the answer. Let's plant a church here. But of course what the Transfiguration is all about is not a static idea of God, not a box to be ticked, but a God who is journeying with us, the Transfiguration is set in the context of a journey – all of the gospel writers agree on this; the Transfiguration is about the fulfillment of the past, in Moses and Elijah and an icon of the future – both Jesus' and ours.

We have to admire Peter's enthusiasm, but a proper understanding of Jesus is not about answers. We as Anglicans do not approach the

practice of our religion as a problem to be solved, rather we see ourselves as being on a journey into a future to which we called by God. In the transfiguration, as we heard last week, we are given a glimpse of the resurrection to encourage and sustain us on that journey. The Synods and Councils of the Church are not primarily problem solvers, but the means whereby we discern the mind of God's Spirit together, not groping in the dark but in the pure light of the risen Christ. It is, I think, important to note that the very word Synod means 'to journey together', I think it would do no harm for the Bishop as chair to remind the Synod of the meaning of the word from time to time.

Some of you may have read of Pope Francis' attempts to introduce a greater level of Synodality into the Roman Church. This is an idea that is part of our DNA as Anglicans. Richard Hooker the preeminent Anglican theologian of the 17th century is widely attributed with the creation of the Anglican theological method based on the three legged stool: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. But what Hooker means by tradition is the living voice of the Church. Hooker claimed that the laity as well as the clergy had a role in discerning theological truth, and we can see that at work in the Synods and councils of our Communion. For us as Anglicans we are receivers of tradition yes, but in a sense makers of it as well.

The passage from Exodus has been much debated, what was this veil which covered the face of Moses? We tend to read the passage through the eyes of St Paul, which is equally difficult to grasp. But I think that Paul was clear in saying that we no longer need to be veiled, isolated from one another, each one of us potentially shines with God's glory and in those important words suggests that we are all being transformed into the same image 'from one degree of glory to another'; for us this transfiguration, our transfiguration, is a gradual process as we journey together, pray together, break bread together and yes, meet in Synod and Council together.

Our AGM today is not just an administrative burden placed on us but an integral part of our tradition. Synodical life *is* inherently Christian, because it all about journeying together. When we think about our involvement in councils, at the local, national or international level when we are tempted to stay away we need to be remember the choice is stark: Shall we live as a true churches, or shall we cease to be church at all? Are we really journeying or would we prefer to simply set up shop here and bask in the glow of the Transfiguration, the cloud eventually covered the mountain and the disciples moved on, what of us. Amen.