

The Transfiguration – Luke 9:28-36

When was the last time that you were taken by surprise? When something happened that you weren't expecting, and the course of your whole day was changed? Perhaps it was something nice like a surprise birthday party or a letter from an old friend that you haven't seen for many years. Hopefully it won't have been a nasty surprise, perhaps like an unexpected tax bill! Sometimes surprises can be exciting, they can add quite a lot of spice to life, they can allow us a greater understanding of ourselves and those around us, and we can be surprised at any moment. If the surprise is big enough, they can cause us to stop and re-evaluate things.

Today, our Gospel reading tells us Luke's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus—a moment of divine revelation that left Peter, James, and John both awestruck and, perhaps, a tad bewildered. There is no indication that the three disciples Jesus chose to witness this great event had any warning, and so it would have been quite the surprise for them. Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Now, I imagine Peter grumbling, "Couldn't we have done this on a nice, flat plain?" But up they go, huffing and puffing, perhaps regretting that extra serving of dinner the night before. When they reach the top, something extraordinary happens - Jesus is *transfigured*; his appearance changes: his face shines like the sun, and his clothes become "dazzling white" – almost so white that it was hard to look at them. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear, chatting away with Jesus. Peter, ever the eager beaver, blurts out, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings — one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." I can almost hear James whispering to John, "Trust Peter to think about DIY at a time like this." Jesus was clearly amazed by what he saw, but, impetuous as ever, he felt he had to do something. He couldn't simply stop and take it in.

This makes me think of the news story about the recent felling of that grand oak tree in Otley. For weeks the community debated its fate: some saw it as a historic landmark; others viewed it as a nuisance blocking the new pizzeria's view. Much like Peter's impulsive offer to build shelters, the community was torn between preserving the old and embracing the new. In both cases, the desire to act—sometimes hastily—overshadowed the need to simply be present and absorb the moment.

As if all of this wasn't strange enough, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice declared, "This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him!" The disciples fell to the ground, terrified. But Jesus, always compassionate, touched them and said, "Get up. Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. This surprise divine interruption serves as a reminder: sometimes, we need to pause our incessant planning and *listen*. At a recent meeting of our weekly Bible study *Bible and Banter* we discussed the need to stop talking to God and pause, listening to what he is saying to us. This is what the Transfiguration teaches us: to stop and simply be in the moment. It teaches us about moments of clarity amidst our routine lives. It's like that unexpected spell of sunshine during a Yorkshire summer—brief but glorious. These moments remind us of the divine presence in our everyday existence. Yet, just as the disciples couldn't stay on the mountain forever, we too must return to our daily tasks, carrying with us the insights gained by pausing and listening.

As we navigate our own transformations we should remember to pause, reflect, and listen. This is a good thing to remember and reflect on as we prepare to enter the great season of Lent this week. This season of preparation allows us time to pause and reflect on our lives of faith as we get ready to celebrate the most amazing moment in history. So, as we leave this place today, let's carry the spirit of the Transfiguration with us. Let's embrace change with grace, meet challenges with humour, and always be ready to see the divine in the mundane.

Amen.