

The Word of Prophecy:**Isaiah 42:1-9**

On this Transfiguration Sunday, we remember the divine word that is spoken both at Jesus' baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, identifying Jesus as God's beloved Son. This word is certainly an allusion to the sentence that begins our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures today, from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. As we read it, notice what expectations we are encouraged to have when God's true servant is in our midst:

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept
you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that
are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in
darkness.
I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare;
Before they spring forth, I tell you of them.*

Gospel Lesson:**Mark 9:2-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

*We have come at Christ's own bidding to this high and holy place,
Where we wait with hope and longing for some token of God's grace.
Here we pray for new assurance that our faith is not in vain,
Searching like those first disciples for a sign both clear and plain.*

*Light breaks through our clouds and shadows, splendor bathes the flesh-joined Word,
Moses and Elijah marvel as the heavenly voice is heard.
Eyes and hearts behold with wonder how the Law and Prophets meet:
Christ with garments drenched in brightness, stands transfigured and complete.*

*Strengthened by this glimpse of glory, fearful lest our faith decline,
We, like Peter, find it tempting to remain and build a shrine.
But true worship gives us courage to proclaim what we profess,
That our daily lives may prove us people of the God we bless.*

Sermon

*For that one moment, "in and out of time",
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.*

Malcolm Guite, August 2017

If we live with things the way they seem for long enough, we eventually come to think they cannot change. It's like there's a natural order to human affairs, and everyone has their place within the society we know. Some people will always be wealthy and powerful, some will always be exploited. But most of us see ourselves as neither privileged nor oppressed. We're just living in the middle, hoping to have the opportunities we need to live comfortably, support ourselves and our families, and retire with reasonable security. That's the way things seem to

us. And if some prophet of perfection comes along to propose a better world, we want to hold back and ask about the risks, because we've sometimes seen such efforts seem to make things even worse.

One day, however, we in the middle may find ourselves surprised to discover how many more than we ever thought are living on the edge, how many are hungry or malnourished, how many are homeless, how many every year are forced to leave their homeland because of war or famine or political repression. One day, it awakens us, and we think it seems unacceptable to God, and wonder if we don't have an obligation out of love to look at the world more honestly, and ask if this is really how it has to be.

No morally acceptable religion can accept the way things seem. It is the essential, healing work of religious experience to say, "No, the world is not like that. This is how things really are." Malcolm Guite's poem, "Transfiguration," captures that essential quality, as he interprets the experience of Jesus' disciples when he was transfigured before them.

The sacred event described in this story is a genuine epiphany. It is a moment that is internal to those who witnessed it. It is not a physical event, nor an historical one. It is more like a dream that is real, because it contains a revelation that has consequences for those who saw it. On the mountain that day, they recognized Jesus for who he was – the beloved one of God, the heir of Moses and Elijah – who has come to bring to us the awareness of God's Holy Realm with all its attributes of justice, freedom from oppression, and vision for the days to come, just as the Prophet Isaiah had promised. And as Jesus was transfigured before them, it also happened that their beliefs about how things had to be began to fade, and left some precious room for the possibility that things are not as they have seemed at all.

Beginning this coming week and continuing through the Season of Lent till holy week, Christian churches throughout the world will be remembering the story of a great confrontation between the world as it was in the era of Roman power and a radical teaching about how the world could be, in the Realm of Divine Righteousness proclaimed by a Galilean sage named Jesus. Historically, the Romans won. The Galilean prophet died, along with thousands of others who had dared to express opposition to the Roman occupation of the little colony of Palestine. That's how things seemed.

But in the days that followed the crucifixion, there was a small gathering of people who saw things differently. To most people, they must have seemed odd, because they were not like ordinary people; they had been moved by the vision that Jesus had shared with them, but more than that, they had seen in him and in his willingness to give his life for others, the power God's love can generate. By this he had been transfigured in their sight.

This love of God is not empty. It says that the Roman power – and by extension, the powers of oppression everywhere and in every time - will have no power over us, because we will not give

up on the teachings of God's Beloved, who showed us a way of caring for one another that is practiced by those who are sure that the world does not yet know how things really are.

Our Time of Prayer

Gracious God, we move today from the joyful Epiphany Season, when we are reminded of the light of Christ breaking through the darkness of the world, and we are entering into the Season of Lent, a time of self-examination and remembrance of Christ's redeeming love. In this holy time, we pause to consider our trust in the one whom you have called beloved and pray that we may search for ways to live out his calling in our lives.

We pray today for our congregation, that we may be strong in faith and love, and that our work to do your will in mission with our neighbors may bear good fruit in the community around us and in the wider world. We pray for any among us who are afflicted with pain, with loneliness, with sorrow, or with grief. We pray that all of us may be strengthened by our common love and care.

As we continue to navigate the crisis of the coronavirus, we give thanks for the scientific achievements that are bringing us hope for immunization and the reopening of opportunities to see other people and be with those we love. We give thanks for the health care workers who faithfully care for us, sometimes putting themselves in danger. We pray for those who are ill, and we rejoice with those who are recovering.

We pray for those throughout the world suffering from continuing political turmoil, the people of Afghanistan, those protesting for freedom in Russia, the Uighurs in China, the people of Myanmar, and the Christian churches in the Mideast; and we pray for displaced persons everywhere, and for wisdom among all nations as they seek to develop humane immigration policies.

May the vision of your Realm be in our hearts, and may the sureness of love bring us joyfulness and peace.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn

“Arise, Your Light Is Come”

#164

*Arise, your light is come! The Spirit's call obey;
Show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today!*

*Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door;
Proclaim the captive's liberty, good tidings to the poor.*

*Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born,
Bind up the broken-hearted ones and comfort those who mourn.*

*Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing; God's power will make us strong.*

Benediction

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Postlude