



# *Transfiguration Sunday*

## *Sermon by Revd Matthew Wright*



11 February 2024

### READINGS

2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

## *The Transfiguration*

The Old Testament reading for this Sunday recounts the translation of Elijah by whirlwind into heaven. This account fuelled the belief that Elijah was one of the eschatological figures set to come at the close of the age, specifically the forerunner of the Messiah, which is why, as far as I understand, Jewish people still today keep an empty seat for Elijah at their Passover dinners.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is pictured talking on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. These three figures are often thought theologically to represent the Law, the Prophets, and the New Covenant or Testament. There seems also to have been an eschatological association with Moses. Apart from him being the founder of Torah, nobody knew where he was buried.

The account of the Transfiguration is a famous one. Our Provincial seminary in Makhanda was given nomenclature after this event by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It is meant to depict or symbolise a change, transformation or revelation, even if it is a momentary one, in the life of the person of faith, whereby their future sanctified and glorified state is glimpsed or revealed.

An aspect of the account in the Gospels which is often focused on is that of the disciples, Peter, James and John, being present and their response in light of this miraculous event. The event occasioned awe, fear and trepidation – they are first blinded by the dazzling brightness of Jesus, but then overshadowed by a cloud. Whether out of sheer shock or whether indeed Peter and the two other disciples enjoyed the experience of being on the mountain, Peter's suggestion is to make semi-permanent structures for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to reside in and for them to remain upon the mountain. A point often alluded to in commentaries is that in spite of the experience the disciples have on the mountain and how this made them feel, they cannot remain there, but must descend down once more into the demon-infested valley to carry out and carry on the work of the Gospel.

Mountain top experiences are necessary for our own faith, but I think for most people are few and far between. As we see or saw with the account of the Transfiguration, they are undoubtedly significant, poignant, and deeply formative events which leave long-lasting impressions. There is a fundamentally significant revelation which is communicated through the event. It is an affirmation of Jesus' Sonship – a revelation issued by God the Father. This, or a similar revelation, had occurred previously at Jesus' baptism. While Jesus undoubtedly enjoyed a close and intimate relationship with his Father and

communed with him all the time, the fact that his Sonship is recorded as being communicated to Jesus (and to his disciples) only at these two vital points perhaps communicates something significant for us.

For most of our lives, it is the still, small voice of God, which we must discern and endeavour to hear. Rarely and seldomly will we hear the voice of God with great audibility and clarity. Such instances do occur and they are vitally important, for what is communicated through them we must hold onto as we too descend again into our various valleys of busyness and distraction. Indeed, such revelations often sustain us until we ascend our next mountain top. And so if you find yourself currently between mountain tops, in the demon-infested valley, do not lose heart, for this too was the lot of Jesus and the disciples. Hold on to the revelation you received at your last mountain top. And know also that one which awaits you in the future.

Amen