**God meets us in the ordinary of life**

**Luke 9:28-43**

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we had a permanent awareness of God with us in our lives?

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we woke up every morning and there was an angel sitting on the end of the bed and we could see the Holy Spirit and hear God speak to us in a clear, audible voice?

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we didn’t have to work hard at trying to find God in our lives but, instead, his presence with us was immediately obvious to us all day long?

Now that really would make being a Christian much easier, wouldn’t it? Because then, when life got really tough or really boring, or we were facing tough decisions or were going through a crisis in our home life, it would all be so much easier with a real, tangible sense of the presence of God.

But life isn’t like that, is it?

The reality is that, as the Bible tells us, we walk by faith not by sight. Moments of absolute clarity about the presence of God with us are few and far between. Most of the time, we may not have a profound and physical awareness of God in our lives but instead we have to rely on what we know to be true in our head and heart and perhaps even cling on with our fingertips to faith, against all the odds. I guess many of us have had moments of clarity about God; moments when we have had a profound experience of his presence. But if you have been fortunate enough to experience that, you will know that the moment fades just as quickly as it arose and all we are left with is a warm afterglow and a memory of God. And perhaps we long for more of those moments…

Well, if that is how you feel – you are not alone. In fact, you are in very good company with the disciples as our Gospel reading showed us this morning. If you want to follow it with me, it’s on page 74 in the second half of our pew Bibles.

This story, what we call the Transfiguration, is one of the most incredible stories in the Gospels. And it was clearly an important moment in Jesus’ life because it is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke and Peter refers to the event again in his second letter, 2 Peter 1:16-18. For the disciples, who were becoming used to the extraordinary as they spent time with Jesus, this was clearly an even more extraordinary event that went way beyond their understanding.

The transfiguration happens when Jesus goes up a mountain to pray. Mountains are important in the Bible because they often symbolise a dramatic encounter with God. Noah’s Ark came to rest on Mount Ararat. Moses met with God on Mount Sinai. Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. And here, the Transfiguration happens on a mountain.

We don’t know which mountain it was; it’s not made clear in the Bible. But it was likely to be Mount Hermon, which is fairly close to Caesarea Philippi. But Jesus doesn’t go alone: he takes with him Peter, James and John, who are his closest friends. And then this extraordinary thing happens, verse 29: “And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Jesus was transfigured in front of them. He was changed, bathed in such a bright light that everything else would have seemed like darkness. The Transfiguration of Jesus must have looked incredible to the three disciples. When Luke records this story, the word he uses for ‘dazzling white’ is the Greek word that is used to describe flashes of lightning: a quite incredible scene.

And then, as if that wasn’t enough, we read in verse 30: “Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him”. Here we have Jesus presented to the disciples in the line and heritage of all that had preceded him in the Old Testament. Moses represents the Law of Israel and Elijah represents the Prophets of Israel - and here they are now, talking with Jesus. Luke tell us that they “were speaking of his departure” and the word Luke uses for ‘departure’ is a very unusual one because it is the word ‘exodus’: they were speaking about Jesus’ exodus - and, again, we have overtones that draw us back to the Old Testament books of Genesis and Exodus.

And Peter, not surprisingly, was completely overwhelmed by the scene unfolding in front of him and just gabbled a load of nonsense to them, verse 33: “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

What a bizarre thing to say! But Peter was completely overwhelmed by this experience of the power of God.

And I think this is the point: Peter and James and John were having a quite incredible experience, something they had never anticipated possible. It was an experience of God that they felt may never happen again. And so Peter wants to bottle it – he wants to preserve it forever. He wants to build three shelters, put down a permanent marker of that experience, so that when life is a bit dull, a bit ordinary, a bit run of the mill, he can always head up to Mount Hermon and re-live the spiritual high…

This is a temptation that we all face, I think. We have probably all had experiences of God, where we have felt uplifted and deeply blessed; moments of real transcendence where we have felt closer to God than every before. And in those moments of transcendent worship, we have wanted to bottle the experience.

And whilst the moment of Transfiguration was an incredible moment of blessing, Jesus didn’t want his disciples to rest there or bottle the experience as if the memory of it would provide an everlasting antidote to the drudgery of everyday life. Because the reality of Christian discipleship is that we are called not to bottle the incredible moments of deep intimacy with God. Instead, we are to find God in the ordinary and in the everyday moments of life. We can’t live in a permanent moment of a transfiguration experience. Instead we are to find God in the washing up and the commute to work, in the run of the mill routine of life, with all its joys and sorrow, excitement and boredom. That is where we are to find God, and the second half of this passage makes that very clear to us.

As we move to verse 37 in this passage, the disciples come down from the mountain with Jesus and look what they immediately face: “A great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not’.”

What a contrast! Three disciples had just seen Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah and watched him being transfigured into blinding light. And here they are now back into the crowd and the noise and the demanding people and confronted by a man with a sick child.

That is the stuff of everyday life: crowds of people, noise, sick children, demands on our time. That is the stuff of everyday life, isn’t it? We might wish that we could stay on the mountaintop and enjoy the incredible spectacle of a transfigured God speaking with the heroes of history. But the reality is, we have ordinary responsibilities, ordinary tasks to complete - and we need to live in the ordinariness of life.

And if that is where we need to live, then we need to learn to find God there.

But how do we do that? How do we find God in the ordinary?

We need to understand that, by nature, God is with us in our everyday lives, verse 42: “Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.” Our God is not a remote God, who leaves us to struggle through the pains of our lives. Instead, God comes off the mountain and into the valley of our lives and gets his hands dirty to bring us healing and wholeness of life.

That is the message of this passage. The disciples were confused, the child’s father was anxious for his sick son, the crowd were anxious to see the boy healed, the disciples were feeling powerless to help and overwhelmed by the situation. But Jesus comes down from the mountain and meets them in their everyday need.

That was the example of Jesus here - and, of course, that is the example of Jesus on the cross; that God promises to meet you in the anxieties and difficulties of your everyday life.

And the heart of the Christian experience is having faith that God will meet us in this way.

The miracle of the Gospel is that the Word became flesh and has dwelt among us. God came into the everyday through the stable in Bethlehem and redeemed the everyday on a cross in Jerusalem and filled our everydayness with the glory of heaven through the Ascension.

That is the miracle of the Christian faith. And when our lives seem mundane, when our lives seem far from Transcendent, we need to hold on to the miracle of faith and seek the Extraordinary God in the everydayness of life. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Christ came down from the Mountain of Transfiguration into the Valley of Confusion. The Extraordinary met us in the Ordinary.

The Christian experience is simply this: our everyday lives, with all their joys and celebrations, pains and tears become transformed by the presence of God to us.

Can we look at our lives and see the presence of the Divine? Can we face the demands of life and find within them the echoes of God? Can we endure all things, love all things and see the pattern of the footprints of God, leading us into a deeper experience of his grace?

God takes the ordinary and the everyday things and transforms them by his presence.

And that is why it is so important to receive Communion, to share the bread and the wine, as an absolute focal point of your life of worship. Not because there is anything magical about the bread and the wine. But God becomes present to us through the bread and wine as we receive him by faith. The bread and the wine are the perfect representation of the absolute heart of the Christian faith. Ordinary, everyday bread and wine, become for us the body and blood of Christ, the presence of God in our midst. We eat the bread and drink the wine in an ordinary way. But through that act, we receive God into the very depths of our being in a most extraordinary way.

So as we prepare to receive the bread and the wine this morning, we give over to God our everyday lives; all the joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains and we ask him to become Word in our flesh, we ask him to become transfigured in us, and we meet with him in the bread and in the wine and we anticipate that it will be a moment of transformation, a moment of transfiguration.

The Lord is here – his Spirit is with us…