

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 19th
February 2023
The Transfiguration
The Rev'd Andy
Braunston

Call to Worship

Come as eyewitnesses of God's majesty! **We come & worship.**

Come & give honour & glory to God in your praise & song. **We come & worship.**

Come into God's light like a lamp shining in the dark. **We come and worship.**

Come & praise the one who rises in our hearts like a morning star. **We come & worship.**

Prayers of Approach, Confession & Forgiveness

Source of light and glory, we worship You.

As angels adore You,
veiling their eyes to Your presence,
we bring You our praise.

We yearn for Your justice to come,
Your glory to fill the earth,
and Your light to shine upon us.

You cause the planets to spin around the sun, and the moon to spin around the earth.
Time and seasons are marked by you, our rock and redeemer.

Yet as we worship we are afraid.

As we praise Your holiness we are aware of our sin.

As we yearn for justice, we become conscious of the injustice we mete out to others.
We long for the light but prefer the dark.

You call us to see justice but we are afraid of your judgement.

God, the true life of all,
give to us, who both blossom and flourish, yet wither and decay,
your love, grace, and peace;

forgive us our love of the darkness and hatred of the light,
our cravings for pleasure coming with the pain of the poor.

Give us time, Ancient of Days, to repent.

Give us time, Timeless One, to turn our lives around.

Give us grace, Fountain of Love, to live in Your light. **Amen**

God is slow to anger and full of compassion.

The Most High forgives all who humbly repent and trust in Christ's faithfulness.

There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You are forgiven! Forgive others! Forgive yourselves! **Amen.**

Prayer of Illumination

You are a light in the gloom, Eternal One, a guide to our feet.

Despite dwelling in inaccessible light

You make yourself known to the lost and the least.

Enlighten us now as Your word is read and proclaimed,

that we may see the power of heaven break into our world. Amen.

All Age Resources

<https://www.allageworshipresources.org/tag/transfiguration/>

<https://www.thereligionteacher.com/transfiguration-activities/>

<https://methodistchildrencreativeministry.org/category/transfiguration/>

Readings

2 Peter 1:16-21 | St Matthew 17:1-9

Sermon Notes

There is a deep irony in our reading from 2 Peter in that the author wants his readers to believe in the Second Coming based on his own testimony of being an eye witness to Jesus' transfiguration years before – yet many, if not most, modern scholars don't think the author was the Apostle Peter! For much of the Church's history scholars have debated whether a simple fisherman from Galilee could have written this. Some think another wrote it in Peter's name – as was common in the ancient world. Others think Peter used a secretary who tidied up his Greek. Others think he wrote it himself. Of course, we'll never know.

We do know the context of 2 Peter. A culture which denied the idea that God, or a god, created the world and all that is in it. All that was important was this life - life after death was denied. People were to enjoy life and avoid pain as much as possible - of course our own enjoyment often leads to pain for others. This cultural context is similar to our own - a functional atheism and the meaning of life as being down to what one can get out of it rather than what one puts in.

Against the atheism we read that prophecy and Scripture isn't just a matter of human interpretation but ways in which God breaks through into our culture, like light in the darkness of Maeshowe's inner chamber. In the face of atheism the writer asserts that Jesus not only existed but was transfigured in glory. Not only does he assert the fact of the transfiguration he says he was there! His preaching about Jesus coming as judge isn't based on clever myth or philosophical argument but on his experience of seeing the transfigured, gloried Christ.

However, the writer does more than simply assert that Jesus had this strange experience on the mountain. Instead, the writer believes the transfiguration is about Jesus coming as judge. (See chapter 3) The writer wanted to reassure people living in a hostile culture that the Lord would return in the glory, in his own good time. The glory first seen on that mountain top would be seen again.

For some the idea of Jesus coming again is worrying, frightening even as it is magnificent, but Jesus comes again and again to us, his love and light break through into the dark chambers of our world. The love of heaven pierces the fog of doubt, despondency and desolation in our world.

Of course this is all, from our modern perspective, rather ironic. The writer lambasts the cleverly conceived myths and philosophies of his age whilst, at the same time, saying we should rely on good old fashioned eye witness testimony. Except, most modern scholars don't think this is first hand testimony. So on the one hand we read an ancient writer asserting eye witness testimony yet, at the same time, we've no idea if he really was an eye witness. Did the author witness the event or does he pass on what he learned from another – possibly from Peter?

Maybe it doesn't matter. We too pass on these stories to our friends and family. We weren't up the mountain with Jesus and the disciples yet each year we listen again to the story - just as we weren't in the inn's stable or the empty tomb on Easter morning. Yet we pass on that which has been handed to us. Why? It's not to promote clever philosophy or to try and win people by argument. It's because these stories, like the sun in the mid-winter, lighten the dark places of our world.

We know these stories and teachings are true not because, with apologies to our writer, they were written by eye witnesses but because they speak to us in our hearts and our experience. Calvin taught that *"we have no great certainty of the word itself, until it be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit. For God has so knit together the certainty of the word and the Spirit that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us to behold the face of God."*¹ In other words we know these stories are true because they speak to us; the Holy Spirit working within us helps us to understand, believe, and apply what we know to be true.

¹ Calvin, John The Institutes of the Christian Religion (Edinburgh, 1895) 113

So if the writer is correct and his experience of the transfiguration is to help him assert the truth of Christ's coming what might we do with that? What might Christ's coming in glory mean for us as we think about the mixture of things we believe and know to be true along with the things we doubt and wonder about?

Matthew's Gospel (chapter 25) tells us that at the Last Judgement we shall be judged for how we've behaved – feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked and visiting the imprisoned. Matthew doesn't mention believing the right things, being a member of the right church, or knowing one's Bible well. Instead, it's the simple things of life that we'll be judged on.

Interestingly, given the Gentile culture of seeing life only as a place to gain pleasure and avoid pain, all the things Jesus seemed interested in according to Matthew are practical and focused on us giving up some time and comfort to bring relief, pleasure, to others. If our culture is similar to that in Jesus' time – people not giving much thought to God, a sense of my pleasure being more important than your pain etc - then Jesus' judgement about ignoring the needs of the poor and outcast are rather poignant.

Our culture has a very acute sense of justice. We know when something isn't fair – whether that's dictators getting away with their crimes or energy companies making excessive profits. The idea of judgement is one that brings comfort, that justice levels the field again, restores what has been lost, gives a voice to those who aren't usually heard.

We shy away from judgement in our faith yet are rather keen on it in our society. If we're burgled we probably want very strict sanctions imposed on the burglar. If we've been subject to violence we want a punishment that fits the crime as well as works on rehabilitation for the offender. Maybe due to an over emphasis on judgement in previous generations we're reluctant to think of it now. The writer of 2 Peter saw in Jesus' coming a judgement that would put things right, a way in which the glory he saw at the transfiguration broke into his society putting all things right.

Affirmation of Faith

Despite the despondency and dark of our world **we welcome the light.**

Despite a culture which doubts **we believe in the light.**

Despite the injustice of despot and dictator, of systems and ideologies
we yearn for the light to come again.

Despite all that drags us down,
we bathe in the transfigured light of Christ which makes us whole. Amen

Intercessions

Source of all Radiance, we bring our prayers to You,
remembering the places where Heaven's light breaks into earth.
We praise You for the beauty and majesty of creation,
for our fragile earth which teems with life and diversity,
giving us all we need to sustain ourselves and flourish.
Yet we are aware of how we misuse the earth,
exploit and not sustain the resources you give us,
unfairly distribute food, minerals, wealth,
pursue policies which lead to great inequality and injustice, and occlude heaven's light.
Teach us, O Most High, how to live sustainably,
to use the resources You give us in ways which reflect Your glory.

Lord hear us...**Lord graciously hear us.**

Light of the World, you shine in the dark places of our world,
bringing to light injustice, oppression and poverty.
Your light brings comfort and justice and shows us the path,
as a lamp shines in the night.
You call us to live in ways which are fairer and which reflect the values You teach,
but we prefer the dark and gloom.
We prefer the injustice to having to make changes in how we live.
We prefer to have more and be comfortable rather than share our resources.
We prefer to close the borders of our hearts rather than let those in need in.
Teach us, O Most High, how to live fairly,
to let Your light not only expose injustice but expose our own cruelty.

Lord hear us...**Lord graciously hear us.**

Holy Spirit, Flame of Love in our hearts,
You help us understand our faith,
You call us to continually serve the Light,
enabling us to discern where You are at work in our world,
often beyond the boundaries we erect, in the people we don't like,
and the places we'd rather not see.
Keep us focused on the light You offer,
keep our hearts in tune with You,
that we may see, hear, understand and obey,
that as we work in the service of the light,
we may reflect light and love to the world.

Lord hear us...**Lord graciously hear us.**

In a moment's silence we bring into the light of Your presence,

O Most High, all those people and places we worry about...

Lord hear us...**Lord graciously hear us.**

We join all our prayers together as, with Jesus we pray: Our Father...

Offertory

Life is not so much about the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of our own pain but about loving service of others which doesn't seek to count the cost. We don't seek out pain but know that, sometimes, the common good requires us to sacrifice some of our own comfort and security – whether that's eating less meat to reduce greenhouse gasses, travelling in greener ways, or paying more tax so that the poor are lifted up. So here in Church we seek the common good by giving away some of our time, some of our talents and some of our treasure that we learn to give, to put the needs of others above our own. Let's pray:

Light of the world, You give a foretaste of heaven where all shall be well.
Through Your light, glory breaks into earth,
showing us again and again how to live, how to love, and how to give.
Bless our gifts of time, talent and treasure,
that we use them in Heaven's service. Amen.

Holy Communion

The Lord be with you!	And also with you!
Lift up your hearts!	We lift them up to God!
Let us give thanks to the Eternal One, Our God!	It is right to offer our thanks and praise!

It is indeed right to give You our thanks and praise,
Eternal One and Source of all Radiance,
hidden in light inaccessible,
yet made known in Jesus, Light of the World.

You have taught us in these long weeks of winter
of the ways in which You revealed Yourself to us.
From the manger to the mountain,
Jesus, Light of the world, You have shone on us with love.
Teaching us to be salt and light,
calling us to be reconciled with You and each other,
yearning for us to love, even our enemies,
You have urged us to set aside our anxieties and trust in You.

Holy Spirit, Flame of our deepest desires,
you fill us with Your energy and vision,
and show us how our world could be different,
as the power of heaven breaks into the gloom of this age.

And so we bring You our pain and our praise as we sing of your glory:

Santo Santo Santo
author unknown CH4 769

**Holy, holy, holy,
my heart, my heart adores you!
My heart is glad to say the words:
You are holy, Lord!**

**Santo, santo, santo,
mi corazón te adora!
Mi corazón te sabe decir:
santo eres Señor!**

You are holy, Lord Jesus,
and in You we find our holiness.
Let now Your Holy Spirit come upon us,
to fill us with Your light and love,
that we may be Your angels in our world.
Let that same Spirit make holy this bread and wine,
which we set aside from all common use,
that as we eat and drink in Your presence,
You may feed us with Your very self.

For we remember that night long ago,
when in the shadows You were betrayed with a kiss,
but before Your agony,
You shared in the simplicity of a meal with Your friends.
Praying the ancient blessings you took and broke bread saying:

Take this all of you and eat it,
for this is my body which will be broken for you.
Do this in memory of me.

After Supper was finished, praying the ancient blessings
You took the cup and shared wine saying:

Take this, all of you and drink from it,
for this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting promise of God,
for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this and remember me.
Let us proclaim the central mystery of our faith:

Christ had died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

Bathe us in Your Light, O Most High,
that as we eat and drink these gifts,
we may be drawn into Your Presence,
where we lay aside
all our burdens,
all our stress,
all our anxiety,
and where You strengthen us to serve.
Give us the grace to take Your light
and spread it in the gloom of our world
so that the glory of Your presence
shines out, exposing injustice and suffering,
bringing healing and peace,
allowing the power of heaven
to break into our lives and our world again and again,
so that through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus,
in the power of the Holy Spirit,
we may shine with you for ever and ever, Amen.

As we prepare to meet the Lord in Holy Communion we sing:

The Lamb of God

Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world; grant us peace.

Post Communion Prayer

O Most High, You have gathered us into your presence,
filling us with good things.
Lord Jesus, You have fed us with your very self,
as a mother feeds her child.
Flame of Heaven above, You have given us a vision
of how your light can shine in our world.
Send us out now, filled, fed, and aflame,
to love and change our world,
in your most holy name.
Amen.

Blessing

All you who have tasted the kindness of the Most High, love God!
For the Eternal One keeps the upright.
Be of good cheer, and doubt not;
for the Ancient of Days will strengthen your souls,
all you who patiently wait for His coming.
Our God reigns, let the people tremble;
the Eternal One is seated between the cherubim - let the earth be moved!
And the blessing of the Most High,
 Source of all Radiance,
 Light of the World
 Flame of our Desire
be with you, and all whom you love, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	<i>RS</i>	<i>CH4</i>	<i>StF</i>	<i>MP</i>
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise	67	132	55	327
There's a Light Upon the Mountains			188	
You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd. (Christus Paradox)		355		
Lord Enthroned in Heavenly Splendour			593	431
O God Thou Art the Father	73	119		
O Laughing Light, O First-Born of All Creation		135		
Bright the Cloud and Bright the Glory		353		
Lord the Light of Your Love Is Shining (Shine Jesus Shine)		448	59	445
Love Divine All Loves Excelling	663	519	503	449
Look Upon Us Blessèd Lord		601		
O Watcher in the Wilderness			667	
Jesus on the Mountain Peak			259	
Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Night			260	
Transfigured Christ None Comprehends			261	

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise

A Note on Sung Settings for Communion

A good resource for these is *Tunes We Know* published by Kevin Mayhew with many settings by URC minister Michael Forster.

RS has settings at 13, 14, 15 & 16.

CH4 at 768, 769, & 790.

StF at 766, & 767.