

Transfiguration sermon by Andrew 4 August 2019 A Lamp Shining

Daniel 7: 9-10; 13-14; 2 Peter 1: 16-19; Luke 9: 28-36

Not many things make me cry. But ridiculous things can make me cry. And one of them is certain moments in certain films, where I get overcome and my children laugh at me. And one of these is when Maria's Mother Superior in the Sound of Music sends the young nun back into the world to face her destiny, and she sings "Climb every mountain". And for yours truly, all is lost.

For Peter, looking back on that climb to the mountaintop and that glory he experienced, this seems to have been, a bit like Maria's moment of inspiration with the Mother Superior, one of the most defining moments in his life. He heard the voice, he saw the majesty and, like the wise and aged nun, he has words of deep, deep wisdom to send us out with: you will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. You could almost almost put it to music – climb every mountain.

Anyway, the same disciples are startled into wakefulness on the mountaintop. It's like all the lights of Murrayfield are turned on and they're dazzled. So much so Peter puts his foot in his mouth as usual. "Master, shall we build three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?" You could imagine him slapping his hand to his head a bit later and saying: You idiot, what did you say? And the Gospel sums Peter up in just a few words: "He did not know what he was saying". He often didn't. When they all descend the mountain and Jesus tells them he has to set his face towards Jerusalem where the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of sinful men to crucify him, poor Peter gets it wrong again. "No, Lord, this shall never happen to you." Only to be put firmly in his place by Jesus: "Get behind me, Satan."

So in the moment they almost don't know what they're seeing and you can't blame them for that. All they know is that this is amazing. Jesus has Moses on one side for the Law, of which he is going to be the fulfilment – "a new commandment I give unto you." And, on the other side is Elijah, to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the prophecies and, in a sense, the greatest and the last of the prophets.

So the disciples want to freeze the moment – let's just stay here for ever because it's never going to get better than this. Nowadays Peter would have been wanting to build a visitor centre and print tickets and sell T shirts. But the answer is "No". Because you can never stay on the mountain, certainly not for ever. It's like falling in love – it's an amazing thing. One poet calls it a temporary madness, but in the end someone has to wash the socks and put the bins out and make sure kids do their homework. It's not that love gets left behind or lost; it's more like you've got to find love in the quiet, ordinary things you share, just as much as or maybe even more than in those mountaintop moments of passion.

The 17th century Br Laurence, a humble lay brother, the monastery's cook, somehow managed to crack this, to be able to find the light and the glory of Transfiguration, of the mountaintop, of the love affair, in the most ordinary things. As a soldier recovering from terrible wounds after a battle, he had a vision of a tree in winter, bare, barren, stripped, almost lifeless – and he saw that this is how human beings are until God breathes life into them through love and peace and forgiveness. That was his Transfiguration moment, his conversion, his falling in love. That vision took him into the monastery.

It took him not to the altar as a priest or into the pulpit as a preacher, but into the kitchen, and here he found the same God he'd met in his vision. He wrote: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; for in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." You could put Brother Laurence in Gordon Ramsay's kitchen and he'd still find God.

That's the secret. Can I find God anywhere? In the kitchen, or on the bus, in moments of joy and maybe even in the middle of an argument. This is what Peter's urging us to see, like a lamp shining in a dark place.

You're the beloved. The revelation on the mountaintop is a revelation of how we all look to God. And this is what makes it such a monstrous profanity, a sacrilege that the first atom bomb fell on this feast day. Not the glorious light of the mountaintop, but the blinding blast of the mushroom cloud.

Because on the mountaintop we're reminded that this is what the children of God look like, and we shouldn't have to be afraid of anything. It's what we look like to God, clothed in Jesus, washed in the waters of our baptism. All the stuff that might make us afraid or ashamed, all the things we'd change about ourselves if we possibly could, God sees through them all – and all he sees is a child he loves, bathed in his own light.

So maybe we can carry away with us today a little bit of the light from the mountaintop. That great song "Climb every mountain" talks about "'til you find your dream." But you are God's dream, the best, beyond anything you can imagine for yourself. This is a vision of God and ourselves and others that's worth climbing every mountain or following every rainbow for. For all our dark moments and our dark days it truly is a lamp shining in our hearts.