**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**February 14th - The Last Sunday before Lent**

**(2 Corinthians 4:3-6 and Mark 9:2-9)**

**“A Moment of Recognition”**

*Dear Cranmer Group Friends,*

*I hope you are all doing well – the much warmer weather makes things rather better, doesn’t it?*

*This week we enter into the season of Lent, and we find ourselves with an invitation to spend more time in the presence of God than perhaps we manage to make time for in the rest of the year.*

*During Lent, we recall the forty days our Lord Jesus fasted in the wilderness, to where the Holy Spirit led him after his Baptism in the Jordan, and where he was also tempted by the devil.*

*I think we can fall into a trap of thinking that Lent is a time for “beating ourselves up” – we’re all familiar with giving up chocolate or alcohol for Lent! But I’d like to suggest to you that this is not at the heart of Lent, but rather that these forty days are a time for each of us to make “a spiritual reset” with the God who reaches out to us in love, in the person of Jesus. I hope that, in this spirit, you’ll join us in spending time with our God this Lent, through the daily devotions of “God’s Story, Our Story”, and that they will bless you greatly.*

*You are all very much in my prayers throughout this Lent season,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you**

**The Collect for the Last Sunday before Lent   
(Common Worship)**

Holy God,  
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:   
set straight our crooked hearts,  
and bend our wills to love your goodness and your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,  
Christ, the true, the only light,  
Sun of righteousness, arise,  
Triumph o'er the shades of night;  
[Dayspring](http://dayspring.com/" \o "" \t "_blank) from on high, be near;  
Daystar, in my heart appear.  
  
Dark and cheerless is the morn  
Unaccompanied by thee:  
Joyless is the day's return,  
Till thy mercy's beams I see,  
Till they inward light impart,  
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.  
  
Visit then this soul of mine;  
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
Fill me, radiancy divine;  
Scatter all my unbelief;  
More and more thyself display,  
Shining to the perfect day.

**First Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Mike Senior**

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

**Gospel Reading: Mark 9:2-9   
(New International Version)**

**Read by Caroline Coulter**

***The Transfiguration***

*After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.*

*Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)*

*Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’*

*Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.*

*As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.*

**Sermon: “A Moment of Recognition” – Rev. Tim Chambers**  
Before Clare and I moved up to Nottingham, I spent many years living in London. I was very fortunate to live in Hampstead Village, which – for those of you who don’t know it – is a beautiful, old, green part of the city, on top of a hill about five miles north of the West End.

One of the rather fun things about living in Hampstead was that, every so often, you’d see people you recognized, out and about. The actor Damian Lewis almost ran me over on his bike (going rather too fast downhill from the top of Hampstead Heath) and I once found myself in a lift going down to the Tube station platform with the comedians Baddiel and Skinner. I and all the other passengers in the lift were on tenterhooks to see if their everyday conversation was as humorous as their TV personas. Slightly disappointingly, it wasn’t.

But one particular incident sticks in my mind. Hampstead has a large Waterstones bookshop. I know that at least some of our congregation are rather partial to the Waterstones in West Bridgford, so you’ll know what I mean when I say that the Hampstead branch had many of their books displayed in a similar fashion – with piles of them set out on tables for customers to browse through, looking rather like a very well-stocked coffee table. Anyway, one Sunday afternoon I was drifting round the shop, picking up volumes here and there, when I stopped on one side of such a table. And I picked up a paperback, and began to leaf through it.

I guess that a movement must have caused me to glance up from my book, and as I did so, a figure on the opposite side of the table of books looked up at exactly the same time. I locked eyes with the actress, Helena Bonham-Carter. I knew exactly who she was, and I guess I must have shown this all-too-clearly, in a flicker of recognition across my face. Because she dropped her book like a hot coal, and made a beeline out through the shop door as fast as she possibly could, imagining that I was, at best, a paparazzo or, at worst, some sort of stalker.

A moment of recognition.

A totally inconsequential moment of recognition for me, that makes for a fun story.

A completely life-changing moment of recognition for Peter, James and John, that is a vital moment in their story; the church’s story, and our story.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we heard St. Mark’s account of the Transfiguration. The word “transfiguration” is a translation of the original Greek “metamorpho”, from which we get our word metamorphosis - a changing of shape, of form. A revelation of Jesus as he stands on the mountain; changed forever, in the disciples’ eyes.

By tradition, the church celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration each year on August 6th, so there’s recently been a bit of discussion in the rarified world of clergy social media about why we also have this Gospel reading appointed for today. It all seems a bit odd, even if there has been a theme in all our Gospel readings since Epiphany of pointing to the person of Jesus. But then, to be honest, the Transfiguration itself is one of those incidents in the life of Christ that people find all a bit strange anyway, regardless of the time of year!

But I’ve been reflecting that, for all of us in the Cranmer Group, today’s reading, however “strange”, couldn’t have come at a better time.

This coming week, we’re launching our Benefice vision process, prayerfully seeking to discern who God is calling us to be in our communities, and therefore what the shape of our ministries to the people of our villages looks like: “Imagining Our Future.”

I guess that a good starting point for this “imagining”, is asking the very simple question of us all, as the church - God’s people - in this place, why we all do this? Why do we choose to spend our Sunday mornings (or whatever other time of the week, now that we can catch up online!) gathered together (virtually now, but - God willing – in person again soon), as opposed to all of the other things we can – at least in normal times – spend this time of the week doing?

And why do we give of our time to serve our church community and the broader community, both on Sundays and also during the rest of the week?

It strikes me that, whilst all of us have our own particular subsidiary reasons, there is basically one reason, and that is this:

That Jesus Christ is Lord.

That Jesus Christ is Lord, and because of this, our lives are transformed.

This is where the episode of the Transfiguration makes sense, not just in the whole picture of our faith, but - I suggest - at this particular moment in our church life.

On the Mount of Transfiguration (by tradition, Mount Tabor), the three disciples who witness Jesus transformed before them, in dazzling white, flanked by the prophets Moses and Elijah, are certain of what they have seen. Although at that moment, they are a bit confused about the implications of it – and Jesus perhaps doesn’t help them in this respect, given his instructions not to speak yet of what they have seen – all becomes clear in due course.

With Jesus’s resurrection, it’s as if the final piece of the jigsaw that was left incomplete on this day of the Transfiguration, is put into place. Now, it all makes sense, for the disciples then, and for us now. Jesus has risen from the dead. The Messiah has come, and overcome sin and death, that we might have life.

But it only makes sense if it’s clear that Jesus Christ, the man who walked, and taught, and healed throughout the Holy Land for three years followed by these three disciples and so many others, is also God himself. And this is what is revealed to Peter, James and John at this moment on Mount Tabor, as Jesus is shown in all his divine radiance and glory.

In the preceding chapter of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, who have witnessed all of his ministry, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter responds, bold – verging on the headstrong – as ever, “You are the Messiah.” This is the first time any of the disciples appears to entertain the possibility that Jesus is not just a good man, doing extraordinary things, but that he is actually divine. The episode of the Transfiguration then demonstrates absolutely, physically, to Peter, James and John what Peter has, just before then, affirmed in his words.

There is a very tongue in cheek Christian cartoon that some of you may have come across – and which I’d hoped to be able to dig out to show you here, but unfortunately I can’t seem to track it down. It does an excellent job of puncturing the notion that, if you follow Jesus, your life will somehow miraculously all become a bed of roses. There’s a line-drawn headshot of each of the twelve apostles, all smiling for the camera, as it were. And then underneath each jolly face, it says how each one of them met their end. As far as we know, almost all of the original twelve were martyred – from the evidence of contemporary sources, it appears that only John died of old age.

There is no way that these men, and countless men and women in the centuries between their lives and today, would have done what they did, suffered as they suffered, and ended as they ended, had they not been certain that Jesus Christ was the son of God.

And this is why the Transfiguration is so important in their and our understanding of the person of Jesus. It is the point at which his true nature is revealed to his followers then, and to us now.

If Jesus is not Lord; is not God, then all that we do in his name makes no sense. Granted, there are elements of church life that would be of intrinsic value if Jesus were not divine – it’s nice to spend time with lovely people. It’s objectively good to care for others; and to give some of what we have, to support those in need. And the cakes are great!

But the church – the body of Christ – contains people with whom we don’t get along all the time. And the way in which some Christians make huge personal and financial sacrifices in the name of the Gospel, would make no sense at all. It only fits together if Jesus is our Lord and our God, and if we declare him as such over our lives as his followers, individually, and gathered together as the church.

And this, I think, is why this reading is such a gift to us this weekend. Because, as we start prayerfully considering who we are, as a united group of churches; and - out of that - how we are in our communities, how we live out our lives as disciples of Jesus; and therefore what we do in our villages and beyond, we do this only because we are united in a ‘moment of recognition’, along with Peter, James and John on that mountain, that Jesus Christ is the son of God. And that moment changes everything.

From the cloud that obscures Jesus, Moses and Elijah comes God’s voice, echoing the words at Christ’s baptism in the Jordan: “This is my Son, whom I love.” But this time is added the command, “Listen to him!”

St. Mark’s Gospel famously ends on almost an inconclusive note. Jesus has risen, but Mark records no encounters with him after the Resurrection. But in each of the other Gospels, there are multiple meetings between Christ and his followers. And St. Matthew is clear in his account of Jesus’s instructions to his disciples, as he departs from them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus’s principal instruction to those who follow him is to make disciples. As St. Paul writes to the early Christians of Corinth in our first reading, we are to preach “not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord”, with “his light shin[ing] in our hearts”,

So as we come together over the coming weeks, to consider prayerfully our Cranmer Group vision; to imagine our future, let’s do so with all of the men, women and children of our communities on our hearts. Especially those of them who do not know the loving presence of Jesus Christ in their lives. Sure in the knowledge that the very best that we can do for every one of them is to welcome them into our church family; to share with them the Good News of the Gospel; and to lead them into the beautiful fullness of life, that comes from that first revelation, a ‘moment of recognition’ that Jesus is Lord. Which, from there, as St. Paul says, “shines in our hearts”, that we may radiate “the light of the gospel, that displays the glory of Christ, which is the image of God.”

My prayer is that this is precisely what each one of us will do.

In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Sarah Hadfield**

When I say “Lord in your mercy”, please respond “Hear our prayer”.

Lord, we pray for your Church throughout the world and at this time of Covid 19 we pray for those countries who have inadequate hospitals and no hope of a vaccine.

We pray especially for our 6 churches in the Cranmer Group. They are cold and empty and many feel upset that they cannot worship as they used to - with the fellowship and love of the congregation. We thank Tim for working hard to organise online services. Help us to realise that you will listen to our prayers wherever we are – going for a walk or in our homes or gardens.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord, in our world there is much beauty and an abundance of resources for the support of mankind. However due to the greed and carelessness of man there are grave dangers to our fragile world: global warming, plastic pollution, food waste and many more. Lord, help us to be aware of the ways we can help however small.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord, in this lockdown give us the strength not to moan, complain and feel wretched.

We ask that you provide inspiration to those who feel apart from you. Remind us of the beauty around us when we go for a walk, the diversions such as reading books and watching television that help us forget our present problems. Help us to remember that YOU ARE THERE.

We give thanks for the vaccines against Covid 19, which will eventually allow us to return to a better life.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord, we remember before you all those who are ill at this time whether with the virus or for other reasons We pray for those families who cannot be close to their loved ones even when they are dying. We ask for help for those who are suffering from cancer, who cannot get the treatment they need, and for those for whom time is running out. Lord give strength to those who work in hospitals under immense pressure.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Loving father, we pray for all our loved ones departed. Grant them the joy and the glory of your kingdom. Lord care for those that grieve, give them comfort and help them in their time of despair.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Lord we thank you for our families and friends even though we cannot be with them at present. Help us to listen to your voice, and direct us in the right way. Remind us you are always there to care for us. Lord help us to tolerate this period of lockdown, give us patience and diligence to withstand this difficult time, which we pray will soon be over.

Almighty God, help us to take this moment of worship and connection with you into the week ahead. May we carry your love in our hearts always.

**Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:  
**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**  
**The Collect for the Last Sunday before Lent  
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake.    
**Amen**

**The Church’s One Foundation  
Played by Deb Hubbard**

The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word:  
From heaven he came and sought her  
To be his holy Bride;  
With his own blood he bought her,  
And for her life he died.   
  
Elect from every nation,  
Yet one o'er all the earth,  
Her charter of salvation,  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses,  
With every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping.  
Their cry goes up, “How long?”  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.  
  
'Mid toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace for evermore;  
Till, with the vision glorious,  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest.   
  
Yet she on earth hath union  
With God the Three in One,  
And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won:  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with Thee.

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ, who has nourished us   
with himself the living bread,  
make you one in praise and love,  
and raise you up at the last day;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you & remain with you, and those you love, always.  
**Amen.**  
  
  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**