

Pastorate worship 14 February 2021

Introduction

As you can see from the date, today is Valentine's day. A greeting of love to you all. The gospel reading is the transfiguration according to Mark so all in all there are many themes to use and I will explore as many as I can. It is also Racial Justice Sunday when we consider the issue of racial injustice in the world. Material has been produced by the URC and I will use some of it including parts of the reflection by Rev Melanie Smith.



Let us come together in prayer: Almighty God, we ask you to show us something more of who you are and how awesome your presence is. Overcome our fear of the unknown, and lead us into a new experience of you. May our worship today be as on a mountain-top, a transforming encounter that empowers our discipleship. Amen.

Hymn: Hail to the Lord's anointed

Prayers

God of divine power, what a spine-tingling, hair-raising event the disciples experienced! One minute they were looking upon Jesus, the man. Next, they were tuned into your glory shining in and through him as he transformed before their eyes: your confirmation of his deity. Your same radiant light, available to us through relationship with Jesus your Son, transforms our hearts. Your divine Holy Spirit tunes our faith in unexpected ways through the transforming radiance of your love. God of life-changing moments, we glorify you. Lord, whereas it's part of our faith walk to seek and be open to life-changing moments, forgive us when we just plod through life and get despondent with the mundane. We are sorry, Lord. On the other hand, we can at times get fixated on the spiritual mountain-tops and so miss out on what's happening below in the everyday. When things are going well for us, we can get wrapped up in the moment and be forgetful of others. We're sorry, Lord. There are many voices tuned into today's world telling us how to live and what's best. But you, Lord, are our authority in life. Forgive us when we fail to test things against your word. We're sorry, Lord. Shine on us, we pray. Jesus' divine nature was confirmed on the mountain – he is God's beloved Son. He went on to suffer; he died and rose again for us, conquering sin and death. Now he sits at God's right

hand, glorified in heaven – and thanks to him, we are completely forgiven. Amen.

Readings: Mark 9: 2-10; Song of Songs 1:5-6

Reflection

I visited church of transfiguration on top a steep sided hill, Mount Tabor, in 2015 and again in 2017 where you can only ascend by minibus because of the hairpin bends. I suppose you can walk up it as well! A church built by Antonio Barluzzi and is has statues of Moses and Elijah. Does this go against the words Jesus spoke about not having a shrine for the prophets.?

Jesus invites his three closest disciples to go up a mountain with him. The disciples are dazzled by Jesus' altered appearance.

This mountain-top experience provides a glimpse of the glory of God, but it is a passing experience. Have you had an unexpected or intense awareness of the glory of God? Was it difficult to leave the experience behind, wanting to hold onto it even as everyday life continued? How can we tune into God's 'wow' moments in our lives?

I had an experience on my second visit to the Holy Land when I felt God was telling me something. There is a statue called 'Feed my sheep' on the shore at sea of Galilee. I felt God was confirming that I had to feed his sheep as he was asking Peter to do. It was a wow feeling that God was encouraging me to continue to preach. It wasn't on a mountain top as it was close to the shore of the sea of Galilee.

Does one actually have to be on a mountain top to get the experience? Does going to the top of Everest, Ben Nevis or Scafell Pike help? No, it is experiencing the power of God at work wherever you are.

Now for an extract from Melanie Smith's reflection. the full version can be found if you wish on the URC website or on YouTube or contact Leonora or me.

What an extraordinary coincidence, that on Racial Justice Sunday we have a reading from the Gospel according to Mark that celebrates whiteness; drawing the connection of whiteness to things holy.

Clothing, thrones, hair, and horses are all described in the Bible in glowing terms as white. The word 'black' in the Bible often carries more negative undertones, especially when it comes down to the translators' choice of words. For instance, dark skies translated as black skies, as a portent of bad things. It's hardly surprising that the

assertion that white is good and black is bad is long established in our collective consciousness.

Yet with Racial Justice Sunday falling on Valentine's Day, it seems appropriate to bring in the young woman's declaration from the Bible's collection of love poetry, the Song of Songs, that she is 'black and beautiful'. However, even in our excitement at this bold statement, we see that the woman then feels it necessary to explain her tanned appearance as being caused by her being forced to work in the fields, a low-class activity. The class difference is highlighted; working in the dirt and exposure to the sun is associated with a low status in society. Conversely, white garments only remain white for those with the ability to stay away from earthy activities, and with the ability to clean them effectively. White clothes belong to the upper classes. What irony there is in acknowledging that light can both burn and spoil as well as bleach and make holy!

The point remains that, generally in Biblical literature, as in our collective psyche, white is good, indeed normative, whereas black is bad, indeed deviant. When it comes to colour and ethnicity, people in the Bible appear as capable of prejudice, extreme nationalism, and xenophobia as the people of today. Surely, this is not God's purposes. Rather, the vision of those gathered before the throne of God being 'from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,'¹ is the vision of what the Church should be, as the Body of Christ.

How do we, in the United Reformed Church, reflect this multicultural vision of the Body of Christ? On an institutional level, it seems fair to say that we have adopted many policies and procedures to ensure that we have the tools to recognise and weed out racism when we see it.

Melanie

goes on to explain how the URC has developed policies etc over the years including setting up the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry of which Michael Jagessar was a member.

Melanie concludes; Listen to the call of Jesus, follow him. Like Jesus, call out injustices, prejudice and falsehoods when you see them.

Challenge the systems which enslave and keep people down. As Jesus listened to and helped people who were ignored and excluded, listen to and help those in our churches who are ignored and excluded.

Challenge the church until it reflects the Body of Christ. Follow Jesus

¹ Revelation 7: 9

up that mountain, follow him down through the valley of despair,
follow him to the cross.

Follow him, ultimately, to the new life where old distinctions of race
and class are irrelevant and, as part of that great multitude before the
throne of God, we look forward to the day when we can join in song
with, ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in
the sea, and all that is in them’ Amen

Poem: Christian love

Prayers and Lord’s Prayer

The heavens and the earth witness to the transforming power of God.
We bring into God’s presence those places and situations that we long
to see changed, transformed for the glory of God. We pray for countries
torn apart by war, for refugees looking for safety, for those imprisoned
for their faith, and for those who will go hungry today... We pray for
our nation, for those with political power, for those who can influence
our awareness of situations that require our help. We pray for the poor
in our community, for those who are unemployed or unable to work, for
the very young and the very old, and for those who are alone and all
those so deeply affected by the effects of the pandemic... We pray for
those who offer support, for doctors, nurses and carers, for those
working in social services, in prisons, and in schools... We pray for
those who have asked for our prayers and those in our hearts, for those
who are ill or in need, for those we live with, and for those who are
lost... We also pray for the multitude of talents among our
congregations that are used in service for you, Lord. We pray for
ourselves, for our own journey of discipleship, for courage, steadfast
faith, love and wisdom, in all we do or say. Amen.

Let us say together the Lord’s prayer.

Offertory prayer

We bring before you our offerings in various ways but most of all we
bring ourselves to be your beacons in the places we go and those we
come into contact with during these difficult times..

Hymn: Christ be the light

Blessing

May God’s grace and love fill the earth and also our hearts, May justice
flow like a roaring, mighty river, May peace descend like a dove upon
quiet waters and may we be mindful always, That in God’s Kingdom,
All are loved to overflowing. Amen.