

Sermon for 22nd February 2009 Transfiguration and New Service Structure

Mark 9:2-9

This morning's gospel is the story of the transfiguration, when Jesus revealed his true glory to three disciples, Peter James and John. The events also show us something about change and how unsettling change can be. So with all the changes going on at St Mary's at the moment it seemed a good time to explain what the changes are about and hopefully put some minds at rest.

First - the image of the church, the new logos we're looking at, how we communicate with the community of Burghfield/Common, who we are as a church. There's some concern that because all the logos say St Mary's Burghfield, I've changed the name of the church. Let me assure you that I have not changed the name of the church, it's not within my influence to do that and I wouldn't do that. What's happening is that on paper communication, like the pew sheet, notice boards, newsletter that will be re-launched soon, welcome signs, things that people see, we're calling the church what everyone calls it anyway - St Mary's. It's what people recognize, and it's shorter and less formal than using the full name of St Mary the Virgin. My name is Gillian Jayne Lovell, that's the name I use when I fill in official forms, it's what's on my driving license and passport, but everyone calls me Gill, and that's how I communicate with people every day. It's the same with the church's name. The full name, to be used on official communication, is St Mary's the Virgin, but the name we use every day is St Mary's, and I'm just writing that down so that we have a clear identity that people can recognize.

The second change is the new service pattern. Not everyone is clear what's happening with this, when it's happening and why. It's an experiment that the PCC have approved for 9 months. The new pattern will start on 26th April and the PCC will review it after Christmas. The 8.30am service will move ½ hr to 8am, but otherwise it will be exactly the same as it is now. The 10am service will move ½ hr to 9.30am and it will be a eucharist every week, just like we have now on 2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays. The groups will still facilitate the worship, greeting people, reading, taking the collection, making the coffee, and so on, the same as now. We'll begin to call the 9.30 worship Living Faith, because it remains the main morning worship and it's purpose is to encourage and enable faithful Christians to live out their faith. After the 9.30am service every week, we'll still have coffee in the Parish Centre, and we will, I hope, be joined for coffee by people who are coming to the 11am service, and this will be an important way for those of us with Living Faith to encourage these new Christians, to share our life with them. The new 11am service will be for new Christians and explorers, it will be called Sharing Life and will usually happen in the Upper Room and it will take the place of the current 1st and 3rd Sunday 10am worship. It won't look exactly the same as these services, but will have the same aim of reaching out to people just beginning to come to church, including our baptism families, and people who want to know more about Jesus but aren't yet ready for the formal worship of our main morning service. We'll encourage baptisms within the 11am service, and that's why we'll worship in the

church building some weeks, rather than in the Upper Room. We'll celebrate communion in this service on the 1st Sunday of the month because the eucharist is central to our life as Christians and worship needs to include the eucharist regularly.

On festival days, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and at Harvest, the whole church will come together for a community celebration. This is a time when the whole body of Christ which meets here at St Mary's will join together as God's family. That means there will be one service on those days, and it will be a great celebration when we share the strengths of each other's usual Sunday worship and we celebrate together that God is good to us that God loves a celebration too. That's the new pattern and those are the changes.

Now briefly this is why we're making these and other changes to church life at St Mary's. Because our lives as Christians are about change and transformation – I've reminded you before that we're a pilgrim people, heirs of our ancestor Abraham who set out in faith not knowing where he would end up, only that he walked with God at his side. God doesn't change, Heb 13 tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever, but we must journey and change because our purpose as Christians is to allow God to change us into the likeness of Christ, as Rom 8 reminds us. Jesus was transfigured on the mountain so that the disciples could glimpse God. If we let God in to transform our lives, then we glimpse who we can be under God's purpose for us. If we allow God to change our church, we will glimpse God in our worship, and be transformed by it. Because change for Christians isn't just doing things differently, it's walking with God who calls us on with him.

Of course, change usually leaves us feeling unsettled and sometimes unsafe, not knowing what's coming next or when the change will end. That's what happened to Peter too – he was totally non-plussed by this change in Jesus, he didn't know what to do or say, so he jumped in with both feet as usual – he wanted to hold on to the moment because it was so glorious. But even glimpses of glory such as these have to change, the disciples couldn't stay on the mountain because God was calling them on to something else – when they got down the mountain there was a boy to heal, work to do.

I don't know if church worship is a glimpse of glory for you, a moment when you encounter God – I hope it is sometimes. But we cannot hold on to what we have for ever, preserving it in tradition without change because it's so wonderful, the language so poetic, or whatever excuses we use to avoid change. There must be change if we are to grow closer to God ourselves, and if we are to do God's work of bringing others to see glimpses of his glory too.

I've spent a great deal of prayer time coming to these proposed changes, and I believe that we will glimpse God through them if we'll step out in faith and trust God. It might not happen straight away, but it will come because God is faithful and honours our trust in him. We'll see God's glory in Christ if we pray, expect it and look for it.

If you're still unsure, please talk to me about it and we'll walk the journey of change together. May God in his mercy make us brave enough to accept the change he leads us into, and give us grace to see his glory in it.

Blessings,
Gill