

Worship for Sunday before Lent / Transfiguration
(complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

A very warm welcome to all of you joining us in worship today.

I would like to thank everyone who helped to prepare this worship. Our preacher is Trevor Pethick, the readings are from members of Mickleton and Radford Road churches and the service was put together by the talented technical team.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Open our hearts, Lord, that we may come to know more of you.

We thank you that, as we journey with you, you are transforming us.

Thank you for the mountaintop experiences as well as the everyday journeys.

We ask to know your presence and your power as we live each day for you.

Amen.

We begin with a hymn of praise.

Hymn: StF 113 – O worship the King, all-glorious above.

- 1. O worship the King, all-glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of
Days,
pavilioned in splendour, and girded with
praise.**
- 2. O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy
space;**

**his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-
clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the
storm.**

- 3. The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.**
- 4. Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the
plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.**
- 5. Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
your mercies how tender, how firm to the
end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and
Friend.**
- 6. O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
while angels delight to hymn you above,
your ransomed creation, though feeble our
praise,
in true adoration our voices we raise.**

Robert Grant (1779–1838)

Opening Prayers

Lord, we approach you as people climbing your holy mountain, hoping to meet with you there. May we be changed by our encounter. May we be strengthened to face the world with renewed courage and faith.

Lord of change, of transfiguration and transformation, yet whose essence remains always the same, we worship and adore you, and we kneel in awe before you.

Saviour God, whose well-meaning disciples sometimes missed the point, help us to keep our focus on You. Forgive us, we humbly ask, when we have been overtaken by our own projects rather than nurture the life of Your Kingdom. We have looked other ways, and not been mindful of You. We have hurt others and ourselves.

Living God, you accept us just as we are, you welcome us into your presence, no matter what we have done or how we have let you down. Thank you for your forgiveness for us and for continuing to use us for your glory.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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 our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and forever
Amen**

Hymn: StF 362 – Meekness and Majesty

**1. Meekness and majesty,
manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony —
the man who is God.**

**Lord of eternity,
dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility
and washes our feet.**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

**2. Father's pure radiance,
perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience
to death on a cross:
suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice —
and as they crucify,
prays, 'Father forgive.'**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

**3. Wisdom unsearchable,
God the invisible,
love indestructible
in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity,
stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity
to the heights of his throne.**

***Oh, what a mystery —
meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God,
this is your God!***

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Exodus 34:29-35 (NRSVA)

The Shining Face of Moses

²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

³² Afterwards all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Psalms 99 (NRSVA)

Praise to God for His Holiness

¹ The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

² The Lord is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.

³ Let them praise your great and awesome name.

Holy is he!

⁴ Mighty King, lover of justice,

you have established equity;

you have executed justice

and righteousness in Jacob.

⁵ Extol the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he!

⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called on
his name.

They cried to the Lord, and he answered them.

⁷ He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
they kept his decrees,
and the statutes that he gave them.

⁸ O Lord our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

⁹ Extol the Lord our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 (NRSVA)

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Treasure in Clay Jars

^{4:1} Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things

that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Luke 9:28-43a (NRSVA)

The Transfiguration

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples

to cast it out, but they could not.' ⁴¹ Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

Sermon

We've probably all been in town, in a shop or other public place and seen someone acting in a suspicious way, or being thoughtless, or worse. In that moment we're tempted to reflect it's a pity they don't know right from wrong. We might remember how our parents brought us up, to be able to tell the difference. Truth seemed easy and clear cut when we were young. But as we get older the clear distinctions start to turn into shades of grey. And now, when faced with a tricky decision we have to weigh up various factors on both sides and come a balanced view. Truth seems elusive and we yearn for the certainties of old.

Our gospel reading places Jesus on the mountain top with Peter, James and John. He uses it as a time of prayer. So far so good. Then events take a strange and surreal turn. We read of dazzling lights, Moses and Elijah appear and talk to Jesus, and a voice is heard through the cloud "this is my Son; listen to Him". As our next hymn puts it, Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around. The three disciples struggle to make sense of what they're seeing and hearing. Yet, within the chaos they glimpse the truth: Jesus is indeed who he says he is, the Son of God, the Chosen One.

Today, truth is in short supply. It seems increasingly smothered by lies and deliberate

attempts to distract, to draw our gaze away from the truth. We're meant to be living in the age of reason, but some people in high office believe that if you say something often enough then it becomes true. Can we claim we never fall into that trap ourselves? We justify to ourselves something we know is wrong by a long list of plausible excuses; we had no choice, we weren't aware, they started it. But that's not how truth works. Truth is not always the loudest voice. Indeed it is often the quietest as Elijah found when he searched in the earthquake, wind and fire. Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

In our search for truth we must be careful not to rush to judgment. The truth lies deeper than a set of rules. Is the driver exceeding the speed limit a medic desperate to save a life? Or the young person stealing a loaf might be so hungry because hadn't eaten that day, or the day before. Not always of course but the way of God always selects the path of love over judgment.

I remember a tv advert many years ago. It was a street scene in a town centre. A mother is pushing her pram along the pavement under some scaffolding when you see in the background a young man running towards her from behind. Shoppers look horrified as they see him heading straight for her at full speed. Your worst fears are realised when he bundles her to the ground. A split second later you see a package of tiles has fallen off the scaffolding and would have hit her but for the action of our villain turned hero.

We think truth should be easy to spot, but it isn't. Many everyday decisions involve balancing several factors. Maybe one person's freedom is achieved only at the expense of another's. Covid has brought this vividly into focus with the debate about the right to choose vaccination or

not. Novak Djokovic has encapsulated this dilemma. The rights of one group may conflict with those of another as we have seen for example in the debate between those promoting transgender rights and those promoting women's rights. All lay claim to the truth, but the way in which some of them seek to demonise the other suggests they are some way from it. Judgment dominates. Love seems a distant dream. Truth is the casualty.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, talks of Moses putting a veil over his face to stop the Israelites seeing the truth, and then of the Israelites doing the same. Are we also susceptible to using veils? Far from grubby rags these are attractive veils, impregnated with polite prejudice, wishful thinking or wilful blindness. Veils that conveniently allow us to continue our selfish ways; the veil of illegal immigration which allows us to justify ignoring the plight of refugees, the veil of self-centredness which tempts us to sacrifice the interests of future generations by continuing to plunder the earth's natural resources at an unsustainable rate, the veil of prejudice which normalises discrimination against people of colour, different religious beliefs or sexual orientation. Veils come in a remarkable range of shapes and sizes.

We may be oblivious to our own veil, whereas someone else's is patently obvious. Or we may know we wear a veil but it is too costly to remove. To do so may require painful sacrifice or effort to change our attitudes or lifestyles. More than we can manage on our own.

Paul is acutely aware of our human failings, but he also knows how the veil can be removed – by “turning to the Lord” as he says to the Corinthians. Of course, he experienced this in dramatic fashion himself. Just as Peter, James

and John did on the mountaintop. The veil was removed and they glimpsed the Glory of God in Jesus. The truth, once obscured, is now visible in Jesus and the Spirit. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place, he comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace.

Hymn: StF 20 – Be Still

- 1. Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found —
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.**
- 2. Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight —
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.**
- 3. Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him —
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.**

David J. Evans (*b.* 1957)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Transfigured Jesus – Crucified, Risen and
Ascended Lord –

who gives gifts to humankind, we thank You for
all that You have done for us
and for the love with which You reach out to
every human being.

For the presence of Your life-giving Spirit in the
Church,
in our world and in our lives,
we give You thanks.

For the liberty the Spirit brings to be whose we
truly are
and to work out together what it means to be
church in these days,
we give You thanks.

Holy Spirit move and prompt us,
show us how to reflect Christ's glory
that many may know the light of Christ is with
them.

Receive our gifts and prayers, we humbly ask.
We offer them in faith and love.

We pray for people who are hungry or thirsty, in
need of food and drink,
for strangers hoping for a welcome,
for people without proper clothing,
for those who are ill at home or in hospital,
and for people in prison and all affected by
crime.

Lord, these are our sisters and brothers too,
help us to do what we can to care and to ensure
adequate support.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

We look to the day when all of creation will be
set free from decay

to enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We pray for the climate crisis that the world's governments may not falter in their commitment to reduce global temperatures.

We pray for the work of NGOs, charities and faith groups raising awareness, lobbying governments and garnering support.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord God, who has made it known that You love justice and equity, we pray for a better sharing of the world's resources, for an end to poverty and inequality.

We remember the work of Christian Aid working with some of the world's poorest communities

and we pray for the work of Covax, the World Health Organisation's body tasked with the equitable sharing of vaccines. You invite us to collaborate with You and our sisters and brothers towards the day when Your kingdom is complete and poverty and injustice will be no more.

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Compassionate Christ, as Your disciples did in Galilee, as the man in today's gospel did for his son, we bring to You now people we would ask You to bless, in moments of quiet we pray for them.

Silence

Lord in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

Gracious God, as Lent approaches and we journey with Jesus towards the cross, may we ever be aware of His glory.

Amen.

The Offering & prayer

Gracious God, we give you praise for your goodness to us. Take all our gifts of time, money and talents, and use them in the ongoing transformation of the world, in the name of all that is good, and right, and just and loving.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 508 – Purify my heart

**1. Purify my heart,
let me be as gold
and precious silver.
Purify my heart,
let me be as gold,
pure gold.
*Refiner's fire,
my heart's one desire
is to be holy,
set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy,
set apart for you my master,
ready to do your will.***

**2. Purify my heart,
cleanse me from within
and make me holy.
Purify my heart,
cleanse me from my sin,
deep within.
*Refiner's fire,
my heart's one desire
is to be holy,
set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy,***

***set apart for you my master,
ready to do your will.***

Brian Doerksen (*b.* 1965)

Prayer & blessing

Father, thank you that you are transforming us every day. We pray that, not only will we have mountaintop experiences, but also that we will know your presence with us in our everyday and ordinary moments. May we be continually astounded at your greatness, and may it show in our lives.

Amen.

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StF 362 – Meekness and Majesty

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

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StF 20 – Be Still

David J. Evans (*b.* 1957)

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StF 508 – Purify my heart

Brian Doerksen (*b.* 1965)

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Robert Grant (1779–1838)

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Bible Verses

NRSV & NRSVA

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