

St John & St Stephen's Church, Orts Road, Reading, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023, Sunday before Lent  
Exodus 24:12-end, Matthew 17:1-9

### **A surprising walk with Jesus**

This morning's gospel reading, which we have just heard, describes what is called the 'Transfiguration'. This is the moment when three men took a surprising walk with Jesus up a mountain, and Jesus' appearance was completely changed into one of 'radiant glory'. It's in a line of other similar, strange but powerful God-experiences in the scriptures: think of Moses and the burning bush, think of today's OT reading of Moses receiving the tablets of stone with the commandments, of the pillar of fire in the wilderness, of Isaiah's vision of God, of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary, of the whole book of Revelation – and so on. What do we do with it? Well, I want to leave that question wide open. Today I have no points to make, no teaching to give, no sermon to deliver. I would like to invite us to take a surprising walk with Jesus up a mountain. I'd like us to use our imaginations and see what happens. Experience tells me that the use of the words 'use your imagination' make some people feel a bit apprehensive, worrying that 'I can't do this', or 'what's supposed to happen?'. My advice is just to go with the flow. You might be surprised! It won't hurt too much.

I'm going to lead what's called an 'imaginative contemplation' exercise, or 'guided prayer'. It is a way of praying that can let us enter the story, be present in the scene itself, in our imaginations and guided by the Holy Spirit. It's more right brain than left brain, more intuitive than reasoned. It may help to sit comfortably, both feet on the ground, hands resting in your lap. What we do with our bodies can help us. If there is something occupying your mind, or worrying about, just put it to one side for now. Relax, let your shoulders drop, be at peace with yourself. We are in the presence of Jesus, and of our brothers and sisters, sitting in a building consecrated to worship and prayer. It is a safe and holy place. And it is full of God. Let us begin to dream. We are entering prayer.

You have joined Jesus and three disciples for a hike up a high mountain. Take a moment to get a sense of your surroundings. Can you think of a mountain or hill you have climbed?

What can you see?

Is there an easy path up do you have to clear it yourselves?

Are there trees or plants? Is the terrain smooth or rocky?

What kind of day is it?

What do you hear?

Are there any birds singing, insects chirping?

Hear the crunch of feet on the ground as you walk.

What do you feel?

Is there a breeze that touches your skin, or sunshine?

Perhaps rain is falling.

What do you smell?

What does the mountain air smell like?

Look at Jesus and the other disciples.

What do they look like? What are they wearing? How tall are they in relation to you?

Continue on your walk up the mountain, letting your imagination of the scene take over. Who do you walk with? Do you chat or stay silent? Do you rest or push on? Spend a few moments on the walk up the mountain.

Arriving at a place near the top of the mountain, you all stop for a moment. In that moment, Jesus' appearance changes before your eyes: *'he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white'* How do you react to this transformation? How does it affect you?

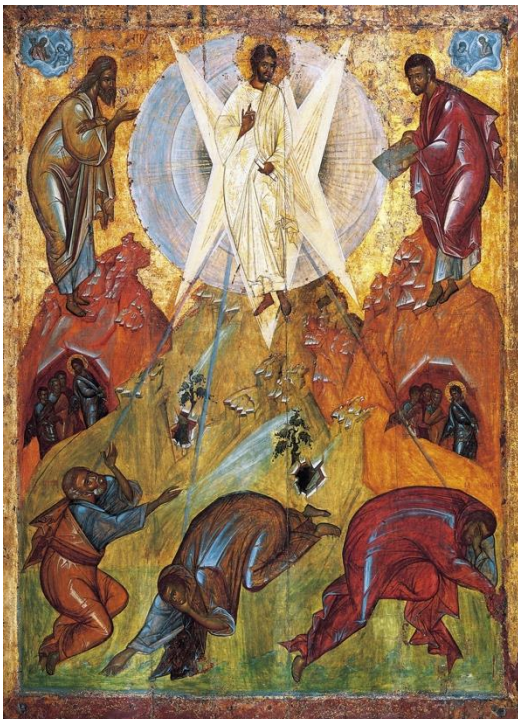
Slowly you realize that there are two other people there, talking with Jesus. Peter identifies them as Moses and Elijah, and he suggests making dwellings for the three of them. Peter says, *'Lord, it is good for us to be here!'* What is your feeling in this moment?

You hear a great voice say, *'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'* How do you react to this?

Let your prayer continue with your imagination. Spend a few moments talking with Jesus or one of the other disciples, sharing your thoughts and feelings about what happened and listening to what he has to say in response.

Now you slowly walk down from the mountain, your mind and heart full of what has just taken place. As you come down, you gradually come back into the room here, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

I wonder how that prayer was for you? I'll be sitting in the gallery after the service and if you would like to come and join me and talk about the prayer, feel free. Let's finish by joining together in this prayer: *Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new; transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory. Through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen*



Richard Croft

Transfiguration icon by [Theophanes the Greek](#),  
15th century