**East Durham Methodist Circuit:**

**On-line Service for 14th February2021**

**compiled by Alison McLeod and Ashleigh Pritchard**

**Theme: Transfigurations**

**Call to worship: from Psalm 50** Psalms Now

God is in our world. We serve him with the kind of worship and thanksgiving that

communicates His love to His children in need around us. Come, let us worship together.

**Hymn: Be Still** David Evans**StF 20**

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 iss moving in this place.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession:**

Let us pray. Almighty God, enthroned in splendour, exalted over all, holy and righteous.

You are greater than we can ever imagine: mighty and mysterious, sovereign and supreme. **We come in awe. We come to worship.**

All Loving God, revealed in Christ, the word made flesh, loving, forgiving and full of tenderness. You are nearer than we can ever imagine: caring, compassionate, gentle and generous. **We come in awe. We come to worship.**

All faithful God, at work through your Spirit burning within us, empowering, equipping, and enriching faith. You are stronger than we can ever imagine: supporting and strengthening, inspiring and instructing. **We come in awe. We come to worship.**

Light of our world, we have so much to praise and thank you for. But when we cannot read your signs, Lord: when we fail to wake up, when we are lost in our own dreaming. **We pray that you forgive us.**

When the old is too comfortable and when we’d rather not be challenged,
when we grow weary of the Gospel demands. W**e pray that you forgive us.**

When we follow the rules and not your voice, when we crush freedom in favour of safety and when we think there are no more surprises. **We pray that you forgive us.**

When we carefully plan the future without you, when we sit surrounded by comfort,
when we turn away from other people, forgive us. Take us to the top of the mountain with you Lord, to the heights, to the place where earth stretches below and sky reaches above. Give us wings to fly in faith and trust you as your saints did before us, full of light truth and the love of God, Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Let us now say **The Lord's Prayer** together:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done - on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,**

**For ever and ever.** **Amen**

**Reading:** **2 Kings 2 1-12** **Elijah taken up to heaven** New International Version

1 When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.’ But Elisha said, ‘As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.’ So they went down to Bethel.

3The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, ‘Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?’ ‘Yes, I know,’ Elisha replied, ‘so be quiet.’

4Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here, Elisha; the Lord has sent me to Jericho.’

And he replied, ‘As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.’ So they went to Jericho.

5The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, ‘Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?’ ‘Yes, I know,’ he replied, ‘so be quiet.’

6Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.’

And he replied, ‘As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.’ So the two of them walked on.

7Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. 8Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

9When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?’ ‘Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,’ Elisha replied.

10‘You have asked a difficult thing,’ Elijah said, ‘yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours – otherwise, it will not.’

11As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 12Elisha saw this and cried out, ‘My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!’ And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

**Meditation:**

Elijah, Elisha and the company of prophets at Babel know what is about to happen – they are prophets!! Elijah is about to be taken by God and there seems to be a tension in the air, waiting for the inevitable. Elisha has been a faithful servant – giving up his family and livelihood to follow Elijah and he is uncertain of his future when Elijah dies.

But his faith is to be rewarded. Elijah asks "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit" Elisha replied.

"You have asked a difficult thing" Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours – otherwise, it will not."

And Elisha did see the vision - suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

This reinforces Elisha’s belief in the importance of Elijah as the chariots and horsemen of Israel come to meet him at the end of his earthly life. And it’s important to note that Elisha is the one person to witness this amazing scene – a gift for him from God and the affirmation of his own calling.

Perhaps you will see parallels in our next reading.

**Reading:** **Mark 9: 2-9** **The transfiguration** New International Version

2After 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. 3His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5Peter 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.’ 6(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) 7Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’

8Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 9As 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.

**Hymn: Speak O Lord as we come to you** Getty & Townend**StF 161**

1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness.

That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

2. Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of power that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.

And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

**Message: Calling confirmed! So where will it lead?**

When Elisha witnessed the vision of Elijah’s ascension, it confirmed everything he had come to believe. It was a moment of affirmation. Then reading of the experiences of Jesus and the disciples on Mount Tabor you do see parallels and so we wonder if this is the function of the transfiguration? - confirmation for Peter, James and John of their calling and their growing understanding and belief in Christ?

Jesus had spent the weeks before this experience preparing the disciples for his imminent death and so the transfiguration is a glimpse of future glory – beyond the suffering and tragedy which was to come. Like Elisha, they too are the only witnesses to this amazing event - hearing God's voice telling them directly that Jesus speaks for Him!. Jesus, their friend and teacher, was Christ, the Son of God: He'd come at last ! As the prophets foretold.

I can only imagine how they were feeling! Since the fourth century, tradition has recognised Mount Tabor as the place of Jesus Christ’s transfiguration and I have been lucky enough to have visited it. It is very striking because it is the only mountain in a series of valleys. There is a viewpoint at the top – apparently – and I say apparently because, when I was there, it was actually in the clouds so there was no view – but believe me when I say that the atmosphere was incredible, especially when you read in the passage of the cloud covering those gathered there - the cloud of God’s presence.

The isolation from the busyness of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth was striking and I have pictures of the beautiful courtyards and flowers and I remember hearing the birds for the first time on my trip. It was a place which moved me greatly. And, as we stood on the mountain top, we read the bible passage of the Transfiguration. I could understand why Peter wanted to stay there a while: to capture the moment and hold on to it.

Have you ever had the feeling when you were at one of those great events of your life that you did not want to end? It may have been spending time in a special place, a wedding, a family celebration?

It’s normal to want to hold onto that good feeling – we like to look back and reflect on those wonderful times and experiences – and, especially in this last year, I have done that a lot – mainly by sorting through thousands of photographs and arranging albums – reliving so many personal memories and hoping it won’t be too long before I can share them with others again.

In our scripture for today the disciples had one of these great experiences, and the whole passage is written from their perspective. They see Jesus shining, bathed in light. They see him with two of the greatest figures in Israel’s history. It terrifies them and it intrigues them. And then comes God's voice affirming everything for them, making sense of it all. Jesus is God's son.

I’d like to share with you a reflection by Nick Fawcett from John's viewpoint.

It was extraordinary, mind-blowing; a once in a lifetime experience – and I was there! We knew something was going to happen; we could see it from his manner when he asked us to join him, but we never dreamt of anything like that.

He seemed to change before our eyes, his clothes to glow, his face to shine.

And then – would you believe it – who did we see with him but Moses and Elijah! Clear as day they were, chatting together like old friends. We were struck dumb for a few moments and then Peter blurted out - "Can I do something?" - "You will stay, won’t you?"

And why not? I mean, we were all enjoying ourselves; didn’t want the moment to end, almost too good to be true!

But, strangely, as soon as Peter finished speaking, the spell seemed to break. The sky darkened as clouds came over and then, as a peal of thunder broke the silence, Moses and Elijah disappeared, leaving Jesus standing alone.

Did we imagine it? Or was it a vision brought about by the heat, or the altitude? It must have been something like that! Yet it's funny that we all saw the same thing, right down to the last detail. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world and it helped me to understand what Peter had already begun to grasp - that Jesus was the Messiah, the answer to all our prayers, the fulfilment of the law and the prophets.

It was just a glimpse, a moment’s insight. We have seen his glory now. The glory of the Father revealed in Him. Extraordinary and unforgettable.

I do feel a bit sorry for the disciples because Jesus tells them to keep all of this to themselves for a while. You can imagine they were desperate to tell everyone about the amazing thing they had seen… but they had to stay silent because there was work still to do!

Jesus’ focus continues to be on their commitment to following Him through the forthcoming journey – a journey we know will lead to the Cross. Following as He continued his ministry; as they continue to learn from Him - because all they learn will be tested in the time after His death.

They experienced God on the mountain! And mountains are very special places where many people find themselves closer to God – thin places – but God does not just dwell on mountain tops, or in tents and tabernacles. God is all around us, in the places we are and in the people we meet – the people God loves.

On that mountain top they had glimpsed something of the glory of God. Where do we glimpse the same glory? Is it revealed to us through preaching? Or through the words of scripture? Or through Jesus himself and the knowledge of his love for us? Or is it in the world that He made or through prayer or in the actions of other faithful souls?

When I was at Mount Tabor there was a group of school children there – and they all had matching Tee shirts which had a big heart and the words "Doing Good – Love doing Good" – and they were litter picking. Loving the world enough to tidy it up! Doing good for the benefit of others.

And so I leave you with this to ponder on – We know where the disciples love for Jesus will lead them. Where does our love for Him lead us? What does our love of Jesus call us to do in service to God's world and to those God loves ?

The disciples were awestruck with what they had seen and sometimes we can lose the sense of awe when we think of God and of Jesus. Maybe we think we know it all. Maybe we become over familiar.

But wonderful, descriptive passages like the transfiguration really remind me to keep a sense of awe and wonder in our worship (and that can be particularly difficult when we are worshipping at home) but it helps us to get a true perspective of how privileged we are to know and love our God and witness, through this particular passage of scripture, His majesty and greatness.

I pray that we can allow Jesus to transfigure all our lives with His love so that His glory may be revealed to others in all we do and say. **Amen**

**Hymn: How great Thou art**Stuart K Hine **StF 82**

I have chosen at this point in our worship the hymn we sang on top of Mount Tabor – How great though art – a hymn I have always loved but for the reasons I shared with you, you will understand how special verse 2 of this wonderful hymn has become to me.

1. Oh Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hand hath made
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

**Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art**

2. When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze: **Then sings my soul...**

3. And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin: **Then sings my soul**...

4. When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art" **Then sings my soul**...

**Intercessions:**

The heavens and 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 and violence and the oppression of others; we pray for refugees looking for safety, for those imprisoned for their faith and for those who will go hungry today.

We pray for our nation still gripped by the pandemic. We pray for those in power and authority, for those who lead the financial institutions and for all in positions of influence.

We pray for the poor, especially those whose lives have been changed by recent events, for those unemployed or unable to work, for the very young and the very old and for those who are alone.

We pray for those who offer support, for doctors, nurses and carers and for those who work in social services, in prisons, in schools.

We pray for those who have asked for and need our prayers: for those who are ill or in need, those we live with and for those who are lost.

And we take a moment to pray for ourselves, for our own journey of discipleship - for courage, steadfast faith and wisdom in all we do or say. **Amen**

**Hymn: Shine Jesus Shine** Graham Kendrick **StF 59**

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth you now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me:

**Shine, Jesus, shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze set our hearts on fire
Flow river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word Lord, and let there be light.**

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence
From the shadows into your radiance
By your blood I may enter your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me: **Shine, Jesus, shine**

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story
Shine on me, shine on me: **Shine, Jesus, shine**

**Blessing:**

Now may the God who said “Let light shine out of darkness” and has shone in our hearts, give us light to bear to the world that all may see and know that God is love.  **Amen**