

Parishes of Aberdalgie and Forteviot linked with Aberuthven and Dunning.

Sunday 28th February 2021

**Aberdalgie and Forteviot, linked with Aberuthven and Dunning
Prepared by Rev. James Aitchison**

Reading: The Gospel According to St Mark, Chapter 9, vv 2-9

Welcome to this Sunday Service. Before we go any further, I'd like to thank the Rev Sandy Gunn for covering for me during my absence and for taking a number of Sunday services of which you have had the opportunity to see online. You have been, and I have been, blessed by those; so Sandy, thank you very much.

Those who dwell in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, in whom alone our hearts find rest and peace, we pray that you would reveal yourself to us in this time of worship. Pour down upon us your spiritual gifts and grant that this season of holy quiet may be profitable to us in heavenly things and refresh and strengthen us to finish the work which you have given us to do, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty and most merciful Father, you are ever calling us by your word and spirit, to walk before you in faith and uprightness. Keep us in the fellowship of Jesus Christ your Son, in whom you have brought near to us the glory and beauty of a Holy life. Give us grace, each in our place and station to serve you, day by day, with a quiet heart.

Amid the snares and dangers of this life, protect our weakness with you never-failing love; deliver us from the evil in the world around us; from the evil that is in ourselves; from all uncharitable and impure thoughts; from all hard and bitter words; from all unkind and selfish deeds.

Keep us in the constant sense of our membership in Christ, in the thought that we are his soldiers and servants, in the love of our Father's house and in the blessed hope of our eternal home, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with You and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

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A few Sundays ago, Sandy read two passages of scripture – those were the appointed readings for that Sunday. There was a passage from 2nd Corinthians and a passage from Mark, Chapter 9. Mark, Chapter 9, is an appointed reading for this Sunday. Since Sandy preached largely from the Corinthian passage a few Sundays ago, I will preach from Mark, Chapter 9, beginning at verse 2.

Hear the word of God.

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up by the mountain apart, by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. And his clothes became dazzling white such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah, with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings; one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say for they were terrified. Then a cloud over-shadowed them and from the cloud there came a voice. “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him.” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them; but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, He ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Thanks be to God for his Holy Word and to his Word be Glory and Praise. Amen.

May the words of my mouth, and the mediations of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord. Amen.

Today’s sermon, then, is taken from the reading in Mark’s Gospel, chapter 9. But before we consider the verses in this chapter, let us go back a little into chapter 8. There we are told that Jesus, along with his disciples, had gone into the village of Caesarea Philippi, an area outside Galilee and in the territory of Philip, son of Herod the Great. Here Jesus stayed and taught for about a week, after which he ascended a mountain – probably the nearby Mount

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Hermon which is just over nine thousand feet high – and he took with him Peter, James and John. They were to be privileged witnesses to a staggering and mysterious event. They were to see Jesus being changed in appearance, becoming in appearance more exalted.

We call this incident The Transfiguration. That this was spectacular is in no doubt, for the language used can barely describe it. Verse three tells us that Jesus's garments glistened and, in the original language, the word used is the word used for the glare from polished brass or gold, or from sunlight and lightening. It was like the light being reflected from a pure white garment or the intensity of the midday sun.

This was not something the disciples had seen before. If it were not for the fact that it was Jesus and they knew him, they might well have been terrified. Rather they were awestruck. It was not to say they didn't feel afraid, but they weren't terrified because they knew Jesus. Here were these three men being given a glimpse – and that is just what it was, a glimpse – of Christ's glory. For no one, we are told in the scriptures, can see the full Glory of God and live.

So here they are, seeing this glorious change coming over Jesus and wondering at the glory of it when, all of a sudden, there appeared to them, Elijah and Moses. These were the two greatest Old Testament figures, and they were speaking with Jesus. Moses was considered by the Jews to be the supreme law-giver of Israel and to him, the nation owed the Laws of God; or rather they saw him as the mediator of the Laws of God. When Moses died the Lord, we are told, buried him in a place where no one could find him. Moses had been privileged to have spoken with God face-to-face and so his death was between him and the Lord. So, there was no tomb, or stone, to mark the place where he died and where he was buried.

Elijah was the first and the greatest of the prophets.

The late Professor William Barclay of Glasgow University tells us that the people always looked back to Elijah as the prophet who brought to them the very voice of God. In 2nd Kings, Chapter 2, verse 11, we are told that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

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He didn't die, in the same way that other mortals do. So, the departure of these two men, Moses and Elijah, from this life, is obscured in mystery.

Now, at this point, it would be well to note that Moses and Elijah had their most intense experiences of God's presence on a mountain. Mount Sinai was where Moses spoke with God and where he was given the Law, The Ten Commandments; and it was to this mountain some four hundred years later that Elijah returned for sanctuary when Queen Jezebel put a bounty on his head. We even use the phrase in modern parlance when we talk about the 'mountain-top experience' when we are usually referring to something spectacular and positive.

Here are these two great figures, then, in Israel's history, Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus; one representing the Law and the other the Prophecy of the Lord. It is as if the disciples are seeing these two things coming together in Jesus. Jesus Christ is the culmination, the fulfilment of all Old Testament Law and Prophecy. It is to him that all these things have pointed. They saw in him, then, all that history had longed for, and hoped for, and looked for too. As this remarkable encounter was happening, this unique and awe-inspiring occurrence, Peter speaks. He says something which seems very inappropriate but he cannot, it seems, keep quiet.

"Master", he says, "it is good that we are here," meaning himself, James and John, "because we can do something for you. We can build little shelters for you, and for Moses and Elijah."

Well, what he had in mind we are not really sure but perhaps he wanted to prolong the experience and we wouldn't blame him for that. So often at times, when we ought to be still and silent in the presence of God, we feel we must say or do something, thus spoiling the moment. We human beings seem to find silence in the presence of others an uncomfortable experience; and you will all have experienced it, having a conversation with someone who says very little and there are long gaps between sentences and you feel that you have to say something to fill the gaps.

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Peter, true to form, is the first to say something; to butt in to this amazing experience. We are told he said what he said because he was afraid and did not know what to say. I'll overcome my fear by saying something – anything – so long as I can take control; and again, no doubt, we have all experienced a time in our life when we wish we had kept our mouths closed. But to be fair, they were afraid, and fear makes us all say and do things we would not otherwise do, or say.

Jesus, it seems, had gone up the mountain to speak with and to commune with God his Father, ever seeking to do the will of his Father and to put his own will in subjection to it. Here Jesus was assured that his chosen way was the right way; the way of the cross was inevitable and right.

As soon as Peter finished speaking, a cloud over-shadowed them. Now, in Jewish thought, the presence of God is often connected with the cloud. Professor Barclay, again, points out it was in the cloud that Moses met God. It was in the cloud that God came to the tabernacle which was the fore-runner of the Temple. It was the cloud which filled the Temple after Solomon had built it; and it was the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would return to the Temple.

The descent of the cloud was a way of saying that the Messiah had come and any Jew of this time would have understood it like that.

So, Peter, James and John were in no doubt as to the significance of it. What is more, God speaks to them. "This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him." Like Moses and Elijah before them, they had been privileged to hear the voice of God on the mountain. God had spoken to them on this occasion – no one else. They had come apart from everyone and clambered up this high mountain where they could be assured of a private audience with the Almighty.

Now this was to give them great assurance in the days ahead, when they would see their Master arrested, tortured and crucified. This experience on the mountain top could never be erased from their memories. They would always remember something of the Glory of Christ. When they were to look on his lacerated, bleeding, broken body on the cross, they would remember how he could be transfigured with a glory indescribable.

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Similarly, our mountain top experiences with Christ can help sustain us through the difficult times. And these times have been difficult indeed. There are times when our faith seems as dry as dust and we feel spiritually barren; when our prayers feel like so many empty words and the scriptures feel dry. And what's more, the Minister's sermons are boring.

When we remember those times when we have been blessed by the presence of Christ and when we have heard God's voice speaking to our soul, we are able to persevere a little longer.

John Bunyon, who wrote the famous book, the Pilgrim's Progress, also wrote a follow-up book called The Holy War. In it, he talks about the City of Man's Soul; in other words, the soul of man. Man's soul is being attacked by Diabolos, the devil and his demons. In the thick of the battle, Captain Faith leaves the security of the city and charges out in the fight, and in doing so he is severely wounded; and would have died had it not been for Captain Experience who comes to his aid.

Bunyon goes on to explain, "It is those positive experiences with God that when we remember them and how He brought us through the difficulties in the past; when He delighted us with his glorious sense of His presence and when we knew His closeness and we could almost touch him, our faith is revived and kept from dying altogether".

My friends we must do what we can to ensure that we have those times with Christ, so, like Peter, James and John, if we stick close to Jesus, we can be assured that we will have a glorious memory, that glorious relationship, that no matter what goes on around us, we will hold fast to the presence of Christ, knowing that his promises are sure and his presence is guaranteed.

The Lord bless you all, my friends, and keep you in his presence.

Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you for this story of the Transfiguration and how we learn from the experience that Peter, James and John had when they looked on the Glory of Christ and how their faith was touched in a way that even later, when they were going through such hard times, they trusted in you.

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Lord, for ourselves, we pray that we might enjoy your sweet presence. Even in our short times of prayer that we have through the day, that we might know you to be near us; that no matter what goes on around us, or even within us, we can be sure that you will never leave us, nor forsake us.

Let us pray for others. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we pray that you will give us the grace of sympathy as we intercede before you, for all men and women. Bless the work of your church in all her communions, and in every land. Help us to feel and know that we are at one with all who love the name of Christ and seek the glory of His kingdom.

Hear O Lord, our prayers, for the peace of the world. Guide the rulers with your counsel; remove from the people all prejudice and fear and pour out your spirit on all flesh that the nations may be brought into a new bond of fellowship, one with another, and together with you.

Show your favour, O God, towards this nation and people. To our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, and all her House. To the Queen's Ministers, and all who share with them the responsibility of government and discipline in our land, especially as they seek to find the way out of this pandemic, and as our country continues to seek to improve the life of all who have been affected by this Covid-19 pandemic.

Lord, give to all those in government, the spirit of wisdom and discernment; inspire, govern and direct their hearts and grant that ruling in your fear, they may lead the people in the ways of righteousness and peace.

Gracious and most merciful Father, let your presence and peace be known wheresoever there is sickness, sorrow, or distress.

We pray for all who have suffered from this pandemic; and we pray for the scientists who have developed, and are continuing to work on a vaccine and on a cure. We pray for them as they continue to develop ways of combatting this disease. Lord we pray that you bring an end to this pandemic; and that you will give to all tired and weary sufferers this day, a gift of rest. And if rest come not, let your Holy Spirit bring to their remembrance, thoughts of comfort from your Word, that they may stay their minds on you.

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We pray for all who are dear to us. Fill us with such love, gentleness and patience that we may walk in our homes with a perfect heart and have in each other a joy that will never pass away, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now, O God our Heavenly Father, you have given us the blessed assurance that the dead, as well as the living, are in your hands. We give you thanks for all dear and loved ones who have passed away from our earthly fellowship. Keep us with them in the everlasting fellowship of your church and bring us at last, cleansed and purified through Christ, to the glory and beauty of your eternal presence, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray when he said, "Our Father".

Our Father, which 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 debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory; for ever.

Amen

And now for the blessing.

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you.

Amen