

The Transfiguration. 26.02.17

How many of you have read the Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis? Titles such as 'The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe', 'Prince Caspian', 'The Silver Chair' and so on?

If you're not familiar with them, these books are written as children's fantasy, and the seven volumes of the series spin an engrossing tale of a kingdom beyond this realm.

These books are loved by children and adults alike, but they can be understood on more than one level.

We read them to our children, and are not surprised when they are captivated from the very first page. Lewis was a literary scholar, and the books are brilliantly written.

But read the books as a Christian adult, and we will find so much more than just a fairy tale. Lewis was also a devout Christian, and his Christian beliefs are reflected in the series.

It's as we come back to Lewis's books in adulthood, with a greater understanding of life and faith, that we will find what the deeper nuances that Lewis wove into the tale.

Understanding God can be like that. In fact, the apostle Paul said it very poetically in 1 Corinthians 13

["When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."](#)

Paul is alluding here to the fact that our understanding of God is something that develops as we grow, and reminds us that of course, we can't hope to fully know God until we see him face to face.

Today's Gospel reading is a story we know as the Transfiguration. It is featured every year in our three-year lectionary, as is Christmas & Easter - and that is because it's a very significant story.

It's significant, because this story it shows us Jesus revealing to his disciples who he really is.

For the disciples, coming to know Jesus was an ongoing journey. When he first called them, they followed him as a Rabbi - their teacher. When he turned water into wine at Cana, sure that was impressive, but they weren't suddenly convinced of his divinity.

As the disciples listened to Jesus teaching, as they witnessed miracles of healing and deliverance, as they watched him still a storm and even raise the dead, their knowledge of him grew - but they still saw him as a man. A man of God, most definitely, a prophet, for sure, the Messiah who would deliver Israel, yes they were becoming more convinced. But the Son of God? They weren't thinking along those lines yet...

But then came the Transfiguration.

We read this: "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white."

That word 'transfigured' in the Greek has the same root as the word 'metamorphosis' - meaning a complete change of state, not just taking on the appearance of something. It's the word we use when we describe a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. There is 'metamorphosis'. The caterpillar doesn't just *take on the appearance* of a butterfly, it *becomes* a butterfly.

In this encounter, Jesus didn't just take on the appearance of the glory of God - he actually *revealed* who he was; - his divine nature, his very being, which shone with the glory of God.

As Jesus was transfigured before them, Moses and Elijah - the two pillars of the Jewish faith - i.e. the Law and the Prophets - appeared, and began talking with Jesus.

This was where Peter tried to capture the moment, and offered to build three tents or dwellings for them. What was he thinking???

Then we read this: "While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

All of a sudden, the disciples knew they were in the presence of almighty God, and they fell to the ground, quaking in fear.

They would have had their eyes screwed shut, their hands over their eyes. Their blood would have been pounding in their ears as the adrenalin raged through their systems. They were absolutely terrified!

But then the Jesus they were familiar with touched them, and spoke to them, “[Get up and don't be afraid](#)” Perhaps it took a while, but they finally got a grip. As they continued back down the mountain, Jesus had one more instruction for them - “[Don't tell anyone about this vision till after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.](#)”

Can you imagine how this encounter would have changed their perception of Jesus? How were they to interpret what they had just experienced? Who was this person? Obviously - he was the Son of God! God himself had just told them that!

Yet, you know, even then, they didn't fully understand. They still weren't able to fully trust Jesus when he was arrested and dragged away from the Garden of Gethsemane. They still deserted him during the crucifixion. They still hid behind locked doors after the burial....

It wasn't till after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit that they understood this encounter - which was why Jesus forbade them to speak of it until then.

The disciples' understanding of Jesus was something that grew and developed. It was progressive. Even after an encounter such as the transfiguration, they still had so much to learn. And learn they did. Ultimately, their testimony changed the world.

The epistle reading gives us a glimpse of their message following the resurrection:

[For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.](#)

Bringing this story alongside our own experience of God, what does it have to say to us?

1. **It shows us that God is patient with us.** He understands our frailty - and continues to reveal himself to us, over and over again, even though at times we might be thick and not get it. Jesus persevered with his followers for three years, teaching them and showing them who he was. God was patient with them when they were fearful and lacking in faith. God still filled them with his Holy Spirit, he still continued to teach them and guide them, even when they got it wrong. And so he does with us.
2. **It shows us that we will always be learning,** right up until that time when we meet Jesus face to face. Which means of course, that we need to be careful that we don't set ourselves up as the be all and end all authority on Christian Truth. We have the Bible - and we have the Church and we have our experience of Jesus, but we can never say that we know it all. We need to remain teachable till the day we meet the Lord in glory.

I recently had quite an uncomfortable email conversation, with someone I've reconnected with after 20 years or so. We used to go to the same church. We got talking about Christians and Muslims. She asked me if I believed Christians & Muslims believed in the same God.

I wonder how you'd answer that question?

I said that there is only one God. She said, but is it the *same* God? When pressed, I said yes - because there is only one God - but then I said that I felt that Muslims did not have the same understanding of God that Christians had. They perceived him differently. Christians know Jesus - Muslims do not. I asked her if a three year old child or an intellectually disabled person who believed in God believed in the same God that we did. The conversation went round in a few circles, and ended with my new/old friend deciding I was a heretic, and telling me I was denying Christ, because I did not perceive Muslims and their faith in the same way she did.

As the apostle Paul said, [“Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known”](#)

Our lives as Christians remain a journey of discovery. We will never reach the end of that journey in this life. There will always be more to know and more to experience of God.

3. **It shows us what we have to look forward to.** The disciples had just a tiny glimpse of the Glory of God. Listen to Jesus' prayer for us from John 17: ["Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."](#)

Jesus prays for us, that we will be where he is, and see his glory - we will be in his glorious presence for eternity! It will be everything we long for; it will be indescribable! Jesus prayers are answered.

Let's pray