

## Traditional Home service Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February

### OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

### PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say: Father eternal, giver of light and grace, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour, in what we have thought, in what we have said and done, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us. We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light. Amen.

### PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.  
Open our lips, Lord:  
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (I Stand Amazed in the Presence)

READINGS – Exodus 24: 12-18  
Matthew 17: 1-9

### TALK

### CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.*

### 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 us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus)

### CONCLUSION

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen.

## HYMNS TO USE

I stand amazed in the presence  
Of Jesus the Nazarene  
And wonder how He could love me  
A sinner condemned unclean

*How marvelous how wonderful  
And my song shall ever be  
How marvelous how wonderful  
Is my Saviour's love for me*

For me it was in the garden  
He prayed not My will but Thine  
He had no tears for His own griefs  
But sweat drops of blood for mine

In pity angels beheld Him  
And came from the world of light  
To comfort Him in the sorrows  
He bore for my soul that night

He took my sins and my sorrows  
He made them His very own  
He bore the burden to Calvary  
And suffered and died alone

When with the ransomed in glory  
His face I at last shall see  
'Twill be my joy through the ages  
To sing of His love for me

O soul are you weary and troubled  
No light in the darkness you see  
There's light for a look at the Savior  
And life more abundant and free

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth  
Will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and  
grace*

Through death into life everlasting  
He passed and we follow Him there  
Over us sin no more hath dominion  
For more than conquerors we are

His Word shall not fail you He  
promised  
Believe Him and all will be well  
Then go to a world that is dying  
His perfect salvation to tell

## TALK

Exodus 24: 12-18 & Matthew 17: 1-9 - Holly Horspole

When I was a child I had a poster on my bedroom wall of a Christian poem – one I'm sure some of us here will know. It's called 'Footprints in the Sand'. For those of us who might not know it, or haven't heard it in a while, I'll read it now:

*One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.  
  
After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.*

*This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.*

*"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."*

*He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you*

*Never, ever, during your trials and testings.*

*When you saw only one set of footprints,*

*It was then that I carried you."*

I love this poem because it so brilliantly demonstrates that while we might know in our heads that God is always with us, we're not always very good at seeing where he is at work – especially when we go through hard times, we can sometimes feel like God has forgotten us or neglected us. And it's only when we look back on our lives that we can see just how God was with us and even how he's used some of our painful experiences and worked them into something good.

God gives us signs of his love and goodness and where he is at work in our lives, and yet while we are in the midst of confusing or difficult circumstances, it can be hard to see or feel God.

Can you think of a time in your life where God has given you a sign of his presence with you, or when you've looked back on a difficult experience in your life and been able to see God's presence in it, or how he has used it for something good?

I believe God gives us these moments in our journey with him as signs. Moments that we can look back on and see God's goodness and

provision. These experiences act as signs because they remind us who God is and, as we remember them, we can find encouragement to keep on going in our current challenges.

Let me give you a couple of examples...

These experiences were signs that pointed me to who God is, who Jesus is, who the Holy Spirit is. They have acted as signs pointing me to God's character and the truth of who he is. These experiences have encouraged me to keep on going when I can't see where God is, and to trust that one day I will eventually be able to look back on present trouble and see where God is at work.

Both our readings for today take place on mountains – mountains were often places where God gave signs to his people.

First, we have Moses's encounter with God on Mount Sinai where God gave instruction to the Israelites through giving Moses the ten commandments. God's presence appeared before Moses in the form of a cloud – the cloud was a sign of God's presence. The commandments were also a sign of God's directing and leading, as they demonstrated how God wanted his people to live.

And then in our gospel reading we have this awe-some but also quite strange episode known

as the transfiguration of Jesus, where in front of Peter, James and John, Jesus is transformed through bright and radiant light, with Moses and Elijah appearing alongside him.

The transfiguration of Jesus was a sign from God to Peter, James and John pointing to who Jesus really was. This experience became a sign for these disciples to look back upon, that would encourage them to keep going, and remind them of who Jesus is, in the face of the challenges and suffering that they would encounter in the future.

I'd love this morning to look a bit at this story from the point of view of the disciples Peter, and brothers James and John...how did they end up here on the mountaintop witnessing this awesome sign of who Jesus is? I'm going to give us a bit of a whistlestop tour...

Immediately before the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop, Jesus tries to explain to all his disciples that he must suffer, die, and be raised again to life. Despite being alongside Jesus for some time, the disciples quite often missed the point of what Jesus was really saying – and when Jesus predicted his own death, we know Peter especially struggled with this, through the famous encounter when Jesus exclaims 'get behind me Satan!' as Peter speaks against Jesus experiencing suffering and death.

And it is after this encounter that we find Jesus taking Peter, James, and John off together to the mountaintop – presumably to get away and pray, as Jesus so often did. And as our reading tells us, when they arrived at the top of the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them – his appearance changed right before their eyes – his clothes turned white, and light poured from his face, as if sunlight was coming out of him. Peter, James, and John had been with Jesus as he performed miracles, healings, and cast demons out of people, but we can imagine they might have been feeling afraid, confused, bewildered at what was happening before their eyes.

And to add to the awe-some strangeness of the situation, it appeared that Jesus was speaking with Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah represent the Old Testament law and prophets, all that has now been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. And as they watch all this unfold, Peter once again misunderstands the situation and suggests building tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter isn't simply suggesting he pitch up some tents for them to rest in, but is suggesting building something like a tabernacle because Peter could see that God's presence was among them, and in the Old Testament, tabernacles were a place where God's presence dwelt and spoke to his people. But once Jesus came, Jesus became the only way that we can connect with God – as Jesus said, 'no one comes to the Father

(God) except through me (Jesus)'. So we don't need tabernacles anymore, because when Jesus was born, God's presence came and tabernacled among us. Jesus *is* God's presence with us in all things at all times.

So Peter doesn't understand what it going on, and as he suggests building tents, the Bible tells us that while Peter was still speaking, the voice of God interrupts him – I love that! God says about Jesus, 'this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'. And when Peter, James and John hear this, they fall to the ground terrified. They know this is a special and significant moment.

And this, I think, is the point of the transfiguration of Jesus – God allows Peter, James, and John to witness this amazing moment as a way of confirming to them who Jesus is – Jesus really is the son of God, Jesus really is the promised Messiah, Jesus really is worth following. Jesus really is worth listening to. This moment acts a sign, pointing the disciples to who Jesus is. The Jesus who gently reaches down to these three terrified men as they lay on the ground and tells them not to be afraid.

While Jesus tells Peter, James, and John not to tell anybody what they witnessed until after he has raised from the dead, we can imagine that this incident is not one they were quick to forget, and is something they continued to ponder on.

Peter, James, and John were significant leaders in the early church. Peter, was nicknamed 'the rock' on which the church was built, and it was Peter who boldly preached at Pentecost where over 3000 people encountered the Holy Spirit. James and John were also prominent leaders in the church – James being the first of the disciples to be martyred for his faith, and John also dying after being exiled for his faith.

All three men lived faithfully for God, living out their callings as leaders in the church, and enduring great suffering as a result of their faith. We can imagine there were times on each of their journeys where they wanted to give up, or where they felt abandoned by God. And yet, when they were going through painful or difficult times, Peter, James, and John could look back on the incredible moment of Jesus's transfiguration and be reminded ultimately that God is real! Jesus really is the son of God and following him is worth giving your life for. Looking back to that moment on the mountain top could remind them of who Jesus is, and of God's instruction to listen to him. That moment became a sign for them to look back on, to remind them what they are living for, and encourage them to keep on going in all seasons of life.

I started by asking you if there were times in your life where you felt like God had given you a sign of his presence with you, or when you've looked back on a difficult experience in your life

and been able to see God's presence in it, or how he has used it for something good.

It's really important to for us to look back on those moments and to give thanks to God for his goodness and faithfulness to us in all seasons of life.

I don't know what season of life you feel like you're currently in, but if you are going through a difficult season, I really encourage you especially to look back and cling to those moments where you've felt God with you, even if you don't feel that now.

Because God is with you, and God is faithful, even when we don't see it at first. And if you can't think of a time in your life where God has given you a sign of his presence or how he has turned something difficult for good, ask God to show you – pray to him that he would help you to see the moments where he has been carrying you.

Let's pray now...