

Sunday Next Before Lent 2025 (2nd March)

Exodus 34: 29-end; 2 Cor 3:12-4:2; Luke 9: 28-36 (Transfiguration of Christ)

A Sermon by Mark Willis, Lay Reader

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have recently returned from a short holiday in the United States.

Before I went on holiday, I looked up the gospel reading that we would be hearing today. I like time to think about what that passage says to me, and to give time for God to validate or reject that interpretation. Our reading today is the transfiguration of Christ.

Validation arrived whilst I was on holiday. We were leaving one of the Walt Disney World theme parks, and proceeded to the transportation centre. A tram would return us to the stop where our vehicle was parked. As we crossed the thick yellow line to board the tram, the conductor announced that there would be 'no more boarding at this time. The next tram will be along momentarily'. I already had my hand on the door handle, and we looked at the conductor for guidance. He announced publicly to the stranded visitors 'It's OK, you two can board'. We did as we were told, and I looked ahead into the next seating row where a young girl gave me a huge smile.

A key component for me from today's gospel passage is the voice from heaven. God the Father spoke twice to the disciples of Jesus. The first time was at Jesus' baptism when he says 'This is my Son, whom I love: with him I am well pleased'. Now at his transfiguration he says. 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'.

There are many people in this world who claim and teach that Jesus is not deity but merely human, not Messiah but merely prophet. That is not the truth spoken by God the Father. He says 'This is my Son' whom I love and whom I have chosen'. What do we understand by the word chosen?

Appointed by God to be the Saviour promised repeatedly in the Old Testament, promised to Abraham and to David, and prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah amongst others, with detail regarding his lineage, birth, mission, suffering and kingship.

In a unique relationship with the Father, as the Son of God, able to offer himself to be sacrificed for those whom he loves. Able to offer himself as a sacrifice for each and every one of us here today. So that we, cleared of guilt for our sins, may become brothers and sisters of Jesus in the eternal heavenly family. May become, if

we choose to believe in Jesus and repent of our wrongdoing. Not everyone will choose to make that step. Many will remain behind the yellow line and may not be invited to come forward.

However, that illustration is not the validation that I was seeking for our conversation today. It was the smile that lit up the face of the young girl.

A smile that I had neither expected nor requested, yet even a smile from a stranger has a warm glow. Consider then a smile upon the face of someone who loves you and is looking directly at you. Does it not reach you like a search light through stormy weather?

How about the smile upon the face of Jesus our Creator, a face which is always turned towards us, a face which reflects a love which is wider and longer and higher and deeper than we can ever understand? How bright might that face beam?

I believe that each of us reflects the brilliance of God's love when we look with love upon another and smile. Jesus calls us to reflect God's love to the world. Just as in Jesus' simple description of a lamp, familiar in every home of his time, which needs to be set not under a basket but upon a stand to give light throughout the house.

We read that Jesus' brightness does not simply stop with his face. His clothing also is as bright as lightning. Christ is lit from within, his purity and holiness shimmering out and around them in brilliance. Might we also? When we take communion, we pray that bread may make our bodies clean and wine may wash our souls. Perhaps our souls are already radiating that deep love through our actions towards one another. We just need to wear the right spectacles to see the glow.

A smile can travel a long way but it will only be received if we turn towards one another. How we welcome people really matters. Some people and some churches are warm and welcoming, whilst others are not. If you are new to St Botolph's, don't be surprised or frightened if you receive a smile when you arrive and when you leave this church. If you are a regular attendee at St Botolph's, don't be surprised or frightened if you receive a smile when you arrive and when you leave this church.

In smiling at others we reflect the love of Jesus and the love of the one who sent him.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.