

KNOWING, SHOWING AND SHARING GOD'S LOVE.

Lord we pray that we bring all that we have been, all that we are now, and all that is to come, to you in trust, now. Amen.

Re visiting

When we look back we can all remember life changing events. Good and bad times that have changed our lives forever, never to be the same as it was before. Events like getting married, having children, or loss of loved ones. Things that change us and our surroundings forever.

We've all been through events that have been scary, confusing or events that were amazing.

As we recall some of those significant events in our lives, we can remember how some of them made us feel at the time. We can also then reflect on whether our feelings have changed since then. This often brings us to the conclusion "how things have changed".

Mission

Our church mission statement of 'Knowing, Showing and Sharing God's Love' evolved through worship, discussion, a lot of prayer. It was born and grown out of the worship, fellowship and discipleship of many people, all of them bringing their own life changing experiences to the table with them. It was born out of all of you, all of us.

The producing of the mission statement has been printed, shared around. It is now published and out there. But that is only the beginning, it is in its infancy. But it can't stay there. The piece of paper can be shoved in a drawer and forgotten. But the message will always remain. Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship is our story. It's come from the past, the present, and it certainly has to confidently be taken into the future.

Mark

As we read Mark's account of the transfiguration today, we are reading it as ourselves, bringing all our life experiences, the good, the bad, the ugly, our story so far, with us.

This helps us to empathise with the disciples, especially in their very human misunderstandings of what Jesus' true mission really was. We can put ourselves in their shoes even though we know what is going to happen. We can empathise with their confusion, fears and denial. The more we read our bibles the more we can see why the disciples would have expected a different kind of Messiah, one that was going to sort out the political and oppressive rule.

By reading Mark we can see how he is leading us up to the transfiguration event by telling us of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus tries to teach his disciples that he is to suffer, he is to be rejected, is to be killed and then risen. Peter has earlier rebuked Jesus for saying these things and Jesus puts him straight that if Peter is to deny God's chosen way, which does involve the Son of Man suffering, then as Mark tells us, he believes that Peter is being demonic.

Theology

As with all our biblical scripture, many theologians have written many books. Now of course there is the internet to access too. "how things have changed". There is a whole wealth of opinions, discussions, debates. There is agreement and disagreement. So much so that I find it quite a relief when I read the words "most theologians agree that"...etc. Straight away I think "oh thank God for that" my brain can't take it all in.

One particular theologian has written that the transfiguration is a misplaced story in Mark and if it wasn't there we wouldn't miss it.

That got me a bit riled up. I thought "he needs to seriously revisit it and read it again." I love Mark's journey that he takes us on, from the immaturity of the disciples, through their growth in 'knowing' Jesus, leading forwards towards many changes and realisations.

I think the transfiguration is a perfect example of ordinary human people with their doubts, fears and confusion trying to journey to get to know God better. God is beyond our understanding. A human has come, a Messiah who has come as a servant, mixing with people that it's not culturally acceptable to mix with. He hasn't come to act like a King or a soldier.

We are still like Peter today even though we know Jesus' predictions do happen. We still tend to neglect the concerns of God and concentrate more on our own human concerns just like Peter did.

People today tend to want more from Mark. Why doesn't he tell us what the name of the mountain is? We could have put a shrine on it and that would be proof for today. Mark keeps Jesus central rather than getting distracted by naming the mountain. He takes us on a journey of how ordinary people can learn to know who Jesus is, what his true mission is, and the sacrifices that have to be made in discipleship.

Peter, James and John, on a mountain, see Jesus become brilliant white. They see Moses, Elijah, and Jesus together. They are encircled in a bright cloud. The voice of God tells them to listen to Jesus. They are to listen to God's Son. They have an incredible experience with God. They will never be the same again. Peter, James and John have the confirmation at the right time.

Jesus offers them words of comfort and instruction during their understandable confusion. They are not to be afraid. Then they are told not to tell anyone what they have seen until after the resurrection. They have to wait. The fulfilment of the mission is not here on the mountain. The fulfilment of the mission is in Jerusalem.

Sharing our story

Ten years ago, I had no belief in God. I had not been christened or attended church other than for weddings and funerals. Back then, the human heart was just what had to be biologically healthy enough to keep you alive. Ten years ago I also had three months off work with depression.

I recall a significant event in my life that was to change me forever, things were never to be the same again. I had reached rock bottom in my depressed state.

I fell to my knees on my bedroom floor and shouted "if there is a God then why won't he help me" and I answered my own question with "because there isn't one."

There wasn't a bolt of lightning or a vision of Jesus in brilliant white which is what I had in my mind would be the least proof required for me to believe that there is a God.

Over the next few days I started to feel different. I couldn't explain the feeling of calm that I realised I hadn't noticed ever before. This was something inexplicable.

Learning to know God's lead

I had a strong urge to phone my auntie, who I hadn't contacted for a while, but I knew she had come to faith a few years before, because I distinctly remember her telling me. I still stubbornly put a lot of barriers up trying to find reasons for why I had to phone my Auntie just because she believed in God. Over the phone I tried my best to explain what I was experiencing. My auntie eventually asked the question "do you think you have been experiencing the Holy Spirit"?

Any atheist in their right mind would have dismissed it instantly wouldn't they? Well obviously not, because this particularly stubborn and guarded person didn't deny it. In fact I answered the question with a confident

"yes I have, it is the Holy Spirit".

I just knew it was true. This Holy Spirit can change lives forever. I just needed confirmation from someone I trusted, someone who had spent the last few years learning to get to 'know' God better.

As soon as I put the phone down, I had a warming sensation that started in the tips of my toes which worked slowly all the way up through my body and I felt it go right through and out of the top of my

head. It was real. I didn't put any barriers up, I didn't feel the need for medicinal or scientific explanation. I just simply accepted the moment.

There was an instant urge to get to a mirror as soon as possible. So I ran up the stairs (which highlighted the fact that I had been miserably plodding around the house for a long time) as the nearest mirror was in the upstairs bathroom.

I looked in the mirror and said out loud "I look different". I had a genuine honest smile on my face. I turned from the mirror and stood there with my hand on my heart. There was an awesome realisation that my heart had 'warmed'. I remember clearly speaking out loud "my heart feels warm".

Of course, the sceptic that I was, I questioned it straight away, a heart can't change in that way. I hadn't realised that my heart had been 'hardened and cold' for months.

There is no medical or scientific explanation for this experience, there is only a spiritual one. This event hadn't just caused a significant life-change to my surroundings, like getting married, or starting a family, or losing someone close does, this event had caused a sudden spiritual awakening and realisation that God exists. God had already got to the heart of the matter. God was trying to make me realise that he is central in life.

I knew it was God. God was real to me from that moment onwards. This was also an awakening into how God works as he eagerly waits to receive an opening, a willingness, a commitment from us to join the journey, the good and the bad.

Complacency

Even if we have known Jesus for many years, he is always transforming us, teaching us. We don't like change, it makes us uncomfortable, because it makes us vulnerable. We will always be learning to 'know' God better, through Jesus Christ. The only way I could learn to 'know' a relationship with Jesus is through my journey

with all of you. Hearing your stories of faith. Hearing when it was that you started your journey. How did you change and grow to have feelings for Jesus?

Mark reminds us that God may be beyond our human understanding but through discipleship we can all continue on our amazing journey in 'knowing' him through his Son.

I was right when I first shouted out "there isn't one". Because through discipleship I have learnt that there is three. There is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All of God who is beyond our understanding but all accessible. The formats of this accessibility has progressed, has changed so fast that we have had to come out of countless comfort zones to keep up.

Stations of the Cross Journey

Lent gives us all that opportunity to re visit how far we have come in faith. It requires commitment from us to journey with Jesus all through the stations leading to the cross. The more we read our bibles including Mark, the more we are reminded about the sacrifices discipleship requires.

It will require us to enter into Jesus' suffering. To revisit it. We are reminded not to become complacent in our 'knowing' of God. There is still much to learn.

This Lent we will again be starkly reminded that Jesus entered in to our suffering. He felt every human emotion and enormous pain and sacrifice.

Before we can truly celebrate Easter Day, before we can truly be sent out as a human sacrifice, to live and work to God's glory we need to continue to revisit Jesus' mission. If only we could achieve a constant Lenten attitude all year round, of giving ourselves to God, keeping him central.

We can only strive to do this through the commitment of Worship, Fellowship, and Discipleship.

Amen