

Sermon Preached at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, on Sunday 6th August, 2017

On the Feast of the Transfiguration by Canon Victoria Johnson, Ely Cathedral.
Services sung this weekend by the Ely Cathedral Octagon Singers.

It is a real delight to be here in a sister cathedral on the feast of the Transfiguration- and we bring from Ely, good wishes from the Chapter and Congregation in this two for one bargain deal of a choir and a canon! It's really lovely to do an 'away gig' once in a while- maybe we can arrange a return match?

Just over 100 years ago, Theodore Roosevelt made a speech at the Sorbonne in Paris entitled '*Citizenship in a Republic*'. It was a speech about civic participation in society. Part of this speech became well known, a rally cry if you like, to stand up and be counted, to do your bit. It is not the critic who counts: he said, not the man who points out how a strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually *in the arena*, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, credit belongs to the man, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he *fails while daring greatly*, 'Oh that the speeches of American Presidents today, could be so inspiring!

These stirring words suggests that glory is not about success, or power, or celebrity. It is not the case that the more we do, the more we earn, the better behaved we are, the shinier and more glorious we will be. True glory involves sacrifice *and participation*, a humility combined with courage, a hope and yearning for a better future for everyone, of entering fully into the life of human community, doing your bit, *standing in the arena* in the grit and the dust, by *daring greatly*.

The word '*glory*', Michael Ramsey, once Archbishop of Canterbury said, is often *on the lips of Christian people, but they have only a vague idea as to its meaning*. The events of the Transfiguration, or the feast of the '*Glorification*' as it is sometimes called, help us understand the word *glory* a little more, - a word which, Ramsey says, expresses in a remarkable way the unity of Creation and the Incarnation, the Cross, the Spirit, the Church and the world to come.

God, we believe, *stepped into the arena of our humanity*, he walked about among us. God reached out to us in such a *daring* way, that it almost seemed like foolishness. When the word leapt down from heaven, we came to know that the whole of creation is charged with God's glory and there is fire and music under our feet. Right here, right now. Every atom, every cell, every speck of dust, every bit of you and me, is infused and transfigured by God. God does not stand and watch from a distance- God is in the midst of us. God in Christ entered into human existence, *deigning to be clothed in flesh*- that he might bring us to glory too-

"The glory of God is humanity fully alive." the second-century theologian Irenaeus said. So we might ponder how we live out the glory of God? How does God's glory shine in our hearts and our lives, as a lamp shining in a dark place? Are we *fully alive* to the wonders that God may be performing in us and through us?

For many in the world today, there is a sense of pervading despair and injustice. Can we as Christian's witness to something better- something brighter and something more glorious for them? We are not immune to the pain and sorrow or challenges of life, but if we have died with Christ in our baptism, we also surely live with him in his resurrection, and share in a joy beyond what we ever thought possible? Wherever humanity is diminished through poverty, war, prejudice, hatred and persecution- how can we, as the Church of Christ, be a sign of God's glory?

In the transfiguration, that moment of light and glory on the mountain top, God shows us the potential of what it means to be a human-*fully alive*, and he does it through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. All earthly existence is gathered in, the bridge between heaven and earth is tangible and we catch a glimpse of what is to come. Flesh and bones can be transformed, they live, they take on a dazzling brightness, we are not merely dust and ashes. Transfiguration holds out the possibility that all things can be glorified. And that whatever we face, God walks with us into the arena.

The Transfiguration, stands at a point in the gospels which looks back to Jesus Galilean ministry and forward to the way of the cross- both are enlightened by referencing the light and cloud of God's presence in the book of Exodus, and looking forward to the dazzling events of the resurrection. Having beheld the Christ as he stands with Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John, are given a vision of what lies beyond the sufferings they will soon see him endure. This is a prefiguration of what is to come, a glimpse of the glory of God.

God's people have stood up and walked into the arena with God throughout history. These are people who have *lived by daring greatly*, doing things they thought impossible, *finding glory* in the most unlikely places, in blood, sweat, tears and dust and even in the failure of a wooden cross. They have found glory in peace, kindness, mercy, righteousness, justice, in love without measure. Their story is not about perfection- or measured by human definitions of glory- their story, our story, is about daring to participate as citizens of God's kingdom, as people who have seen the glory as of a fathers only Son.

No matter how small or insignificant we think we are, whatever our hopes or fears, failures, or doubts, whatever we hide away and keep secret, whatever sadness we carry, God's transforming power, takes all this, and turns it into light and life, giving each one of us strength to play our part in the transfiguration of the world from a place of suffering, death and corruption to a realm of infinite light, joy and love.

C.S.Lewis said that *'Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses, for in him also Christ the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.'*

The Glory of God, is reflected in every human face, and we see God in each other, fully alive. This vision of glory, is a world away from today's 140 character political speeches which question the humanity of our neighbour and fail to see God's glory within them.

This vision of glory is a world away from those who view the earth and all that is in it, as something to be exploited for gain, rather than cherished for the future and nurtured as a gift from God. This vision of glory is a world away from those who extend their own egos with weapons and threats of war and division, where the common good is overwhelmed by an individualism which strives only for itself and its own end.

If we as Christians can learn to see glory in the world and in our neighbour, *as much as we see it in the blessed sacrament*- true change and transfiguration can surely be possible. As we approach the altar today, we are all stepping into the arena, opening ourselves up to the power of divine love which can transform and change the world we live in for the good of all. Rather than looking on from afar as turmoil and chaos reign, or standing on the sidelines and criticizing, the events of the transfiguration help us realize that we are called to be active participants in this thing called life, not just passive observers-seizing the day that is given to us, and actually becoming the change we want to see in the church and in the world.

We each taste what glory is like in the sacrament of the eucharist, Christ dwells in us, we in him, and we are given strength to participate in the world he came to save. We are *fully alive* to the truth that God has transformed fallen humanity through love, and the dust of which we are made.....can be transfigured, and its' origin and its' destiny, is glory. In Jesus Christ, God stepped into the arena, and as citizens of the kingdom, in whatever way we can, in what we think, and do and say, in how we live- we are called to do the same- transformed daily into his likeness, from glory, to glory. **Amen.**