

Good morning everyone, and a Happy Valentine's Day to you. I am reminded that on this Sunday in other years we have had the pleasure and privilege of holding a gathering at Merevale Church for all those couples who have weddings booked in our group of churches. Sadly, we cannot hold that event at this time for obvious reasons, but we do hold in our thoughts and prayers all those who are planning for their wedding day amidst all the uncertainties around lockdown restrictions. I can assure you, and them, that as churches here we are doing all we can to be as supportive and flexible as we can be. I pray that it will not be long before we can hold such celebrations again.

<https://youtu.be/YAVXLhkCE2s>



## Worship and Reflection for the Sunday Next Before Lent

A service for the Sunday next before Lent (14 February 2021) from the Kingsbury and Baxterley Group of Churches, with a reflection by Revd Dr John White on t...

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be)

The theme for our video service today is that of the Transfiguration of Jesus, recounted in our Gospel reading from Mark 9.2-9. Thank you to those who shared in the Zoom Bible Study on that passage last Wednesday, which generated many ideas which I certainly found helpful. Instead of a Bible study this week, there will be a short Ash Wednesday service on Zoom at 7pm (log in details for that and the Tuesday evening Compline are on the attached newsletter). I shall also post a youtube service for AshWednesday on facebook. Whilst we cannot receive the imposition of ashes in church this year, we can ash ourselves as part of that service; traditionally, the ash is formed by burning last year's palm crosses, but that is not essential - any ash will do, but just make sure it has cooled down before putting it on your forehead! (A tip for burning your palm cross, if you still have one from a previous year - dry it out thoroughly in a warm oven before trying to set it alight, and be careful!). I shall be distributing new palm crosses in time for Palm Sunday, when it is likely that we will be able to have services both in person (possibly outdoors) and online.

For the following Wednesdays in Lent, the Wednesday Zoom Bible study will follow a Lent reflections course entitled "Lenten Landscapes", and I shall be distributing materials to support this in the next few days, along with some other prayer resources for Lent which I hope you will find helpful.

I have been sending this weekly email out to those whose email addresses I have on our mailing list, but I'm aware that has not been complete. So firstly my apologies to anyone who has not had it previously, and my thanks to those of you who have been forwarding it to friends who you think are interested. I am quite happy for it to be circulated as widely as possible. At the same time, I don't want to be swamping people's inboxes; if by any chance you have been receiving these messages and would prefer no longer to do so, just let me know and I will remove your name from the list.

With love and best wishes

John

Revd Dr John White

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### **Sunday before Lent 14 February 2021**

#### **2 Corinthians 4.3-6    Mark 9.2-9**

On reading the story of the Transfiguration this week, a question struck me that would never have occurred to me just twelve months ago, and it is this: When Jesus invited Peter, James and John to go with him up a high mountain, was this an essential journey? It has become part of our lockdown lives to ask that question every time we venture out of our front doors. Is this a trip that really needs to be made, for work or medical reasons, for exercise or essential shopping? Not so long ago, I would think little of getting into my car on a day off and heading out somewhere nice for a pub lunch and a hike. No chance of that now, though I recognise how fortunate we are in this area to have fine countryside to walk in without making that journey beforehand. We may or may not have sympathy with those who have been stopped by the police when trying to park at the one of the beauty spots in the Peak District and told that theirs was not an essential journey and they should go back home immediately.

Of course, for Jesus and the disciples there was no lockdown, no pandemic (though plenty of sickness). But the question of whether their trip up a mountain was an essential journey is still I think a valid one. Until fairly recently in human history (probably around the nineteenth century) the idea of climbing mountains just for recreation, to enjoy the view, or to get the exercise, or to face a personal challenge would have seemed quite preposterous. For most people in most societies, life is hard enough, and dangerous enough, as it is without incurring the extra effort and risk entailed in heading to a mountain top, when there was no compelling reason to be there. So I wonder if these three disciples, when Jesus invited them to go with him up the mountain, asked themselves or asked their Master, "Why? Is this really necessary?"

In Biblical times, whilst climbing mountains was rare, it was not completely unheard of. Stories of Moses on Mount Sinai and Elijah on Mount Carmel show how mountain tops were seen as places of revelation and encounter, places where the transcendent glory of God might be seen and experienced in extraordinary and powerful ways. So it proves to be on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, James and John are enabled to see Jesus, literally, in a new light, shining out with the visible glory of the invisible God. It is an unforgettable experience, which must surely have left the disciples also transformed, long after they returned down the mountain side to the company of their fellow disciples, to whom they are barred from speaking a word.

A special moment; but the question remains. Was the ascent of the Mount of Transfiguration an essential journey? One way of answering that question would be to ask what, if anything, would have been different if this incident had never happened? To which the honest answer would have to be: not a lot, and nothing of real import. Jesus would still have continued on his journey to Jerusalem. The saving events of the cross and resurrection would still have taken place. Jesus would still have been the Son of God, the beloved. And even for the disciples, and for us, the transfiguration does not tell us anything about Jesus that we would not otherwise have known. When John, in the prologue to his Gospel, declared, "We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth", he was not only (or even mainly) referring to an isolated incident witnessed by less than a handful of people, but to the whole of Jesus' life and work, both before and after the resurrection. If the disciples had not seen the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ, before they went up the mountain, you would have to say they were not paying attention. Although the transfiguration made that glory unmistakable, it did not reveal a different Jesus to the one they had left their nets to follow down by the lakeside. The mountain top experience enjoyed by Peter, James and John was a privilege; but it was not a necessity.

Perhaps we would do well to make a distinction between what is necessary and what is essential. Jesus did not need to go up the mountain, or to take his friends with him, to accomplish the purpose for which he had been sent. The disciples did not need to go up the mountain to know that Jesus was worthy of their worship, their obedience, and their love. The transfiguration was not necessary; but it is essential, in that it expresses the essence of who Jesus is, and how we are to respond to him. The voice from the clouds is not just for the three disciples, but for us all; "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!"

Maybe that distinction between what is necessary and what is essential may help us as we struggle with the issue that has vexed many in the wider church since the first lockdown began. If worship is a (and perhaps the) essential activity of the church, is it necessary to gather together in the church buildings week by week? I look forward to the time that we can do so again, safely and responsibly; but until that time comes we can be sure of this. The glory of God is not only to be encountered in a particular place, whether that be the Mount of Transfiguration or a treasured church building, but is present wherever God's people incline their hearts in worship, lift their voices in praise, and turn their ears to listen to Jesus, God's beloved and gracious Son. That, and that alone, is our essential task.

Dear all,

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. A music selection below to accompany Sunday 14th February. Some slightly different choices today, possibly less well known, but I hope you enjoy them.

105 - Christ, whose glory fills the skies - [Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies - YouTube](#)

86 - Bright the vision that delighted - [Bright the vision that delighted \(Redhead No.46\) - YouTube](#)

293 - How good is the God we adore - [How Good Is the God We Adore - YouTube](#)

357 - Jesus on/Christ upon the mountain peak - [Jesus On the Mountain Peak \(Mowsley\) - YouTube](#)

Some extra...

And did those feet - [Jerusalem, the Anthem, with simultaneous lyrics - YouTube](#)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness - [Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness \(Christ be Our Light\) 16x9 - YouTube](#)

Rock of ages, cleft for me - [Rock of Ages - YouTube](#)

Sing of the Lord's goodness - [Sing of the Lord's Goodness - YouTube](#)

Aurea luce - [Aurea luce \(SATB\) - YouTube](#)

My eyes for beauty pine Howells - [My eyes for beauty pine - YouTube](#)

Spirit Of The Living God - [Spirit Of The Living God - YouTube](#)

We have made it to half term!! This week the girls have worked extra hard to get all of their school work done so they can have a total rest next week. Tom and I attended a lovely online parents evening and are super proud of them and how they have managed to keep motivated and learning during this difficult time for the students and the teachers. We are hoping for some nice weather so they can go for bike rides and walks whilst Tom and I are at work next week too so they can have a break from being online all day....fingers crossed.

We have been making a 3D model of Hogwarts Castle this week which is almost complete and has been really good fun to do. Emily has also, with help from youtube tutorials, taught herself to knit on circular pins so lots of new projects opened up for her. Yet again I am amazed at how the girls can learn the new skills and am convinced even more that the crafting gene skipped a generation! Phoebe continues to enjoy painting and has enjoyed using her paint pens this week to decorate a wooden box.

Tom has dug over our garden and we are hoping to start first early potatoes once the ground has warmed up a bit - any advice from the gardeners among you on how long we should hold off for please?

We hope you are all staying warm and as well as possible. Sending lots of love

From

Sarah, Tom , Emily and Phoebe xxxx