

ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

SUNDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2010

Rev. Vladimir Korotkov

Luke 9: 28-43

"Seeing Things Differently"

1. Seeing while not seeing

A year ago on Transfiguration Sunday I concluding my witness by saying that transfiguring experiences are common to all human beings, cultures and religions. They empower, enlighten and even transform and sustain us in different ways. In such experiences, we have the opportunity to **see things differently**.

Yet, we can only really see them as they are if we are not trapped inside our own view of things. Only *if* our **seeing** is free and open to *see the different*.

Peter cannot see things differently! In our Lukan reading of the transfiguration, Peter "sees" Jesus in his changed, dazzling appearance, talking with Moses and Elijah, but he projects his own limited view of things onto Jesus and the event. As Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun and a social psychologist, remarked on ABC Radio National a few years ago:

In the story of the Transfiguration ... [the disciples experience the] unexpected and certainly the disturbing. ... Peter ... opted for piety.

"Let's settle down here, Jesus, and build three booths." ...Peter... was opting for a religion of temples, institutions and shrines. ...for a religion that transcends the world... [for a] ...privatised religion. (*"The role of real religion from the perspective of the Transfiguration"*)

In the French movie *Chaos*, which I mentioned last week, Paul and Helene witness the beating of a young woman outside their car! Yet, Paul is unable to see this event except as a threat to his life. He does not see the woman. He is trapped inside his self-referencing, narcissistic state.

What inhibits Peter in his seeing? What traps Paul inside his own internal world?

2. Beyond seeing only from our inside

One interpretation about such inhibition and entrapment is that we internalise stories from others and our society and they shape our view of ourselves and what is possible and real.

Recently when speaking on ABC Radio National, *The Spirit of Things*, Sr Joan Chittister, now also Co-Chair of *The Global Peace Initiative of Women*, made this comment on how we can all internalise messages from others and even oppress and limit ourselves.

She related the conclusion by social psychological research on why African American's burnt their own districts during the 1960s Civil Rights movement.

... that oppressed people always internalise the message of the oppressor. It happens after the Civil War, it was the black adult who told young blacks that they ought not to leave, they could not leave the plantations ...

(www.abc.net.au/rn/spiritofthings/stories/2010/2803410.htm)

Her point was that minorities oppress and limit themselves instead of their oppressors. They become locked into self-hatred, and, according to Chittister, they need to realise that this is about the lack of self-esteem. And that all minority groups, including women, have self-esteem problems: ... when women began to be telephone operators, it was women who said 'Women have too high a voice, they shouldn't be telephone operators.' ...

What point am I making here? I'm telling you that any oppressed people first have to discover themselves. They start with self-hatred, and then there's the whole question, the whole time spent in esteem-building.

Ralph D Stacey adds a deeper interpretation. He suggests that individuals and groups make sense of themselves and how they should act by referring to unconscious scripts, rules and mental models developed over a lifetime's experience: "that is, ways of making sense of the world, of interpreting and attaching meaning to events, of selecting and evaluating information" (*Complexity and Creativity in Organisations*, 31).

For example, suppose that I frequently use the script ("I'm OK; you're not OK" (if Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1964) is used to interpret events]). Then, when I discover an undesirable state of affairs, my evaluation will be made according to the rule "if something goes wrong it is your fault"... (31)

Rather than Chittister's esteem-building solution, Stacey suggests that complexity theory and psychoanalytic and other human sciences enable reflection on how we create meaning and behaviour, and how accepting and staying with the anxiety of emergent chaos transforms our mental models and life around us.

3. Setting out past our self into transforming life

Peter's response to this surprising, unexpected and disturbing experience was an initial anxious step in which he made a limiting response: To just build a monument, a pious, isolationist, institutional response.

Yet he moved beyond that initial response that set him onto a journey of transfiguration!

Anxiety and uncertainty is normal and human. Yet, it does not end there, otherwise we will be stuck. As Chittister said: "Real religion, the scripture insists, is not about transcending life; real religion is about our transforming life."

The gospel of the transfiguration ... calls us to become enlightened; calls us to change our attitudes about the role of religion; calls us to understand the nature of religion itself; because the so-called rational has failed.

... Transfiguration means that the role of religion demands enlightenment. The role of religion is to bring us to an awareness of life. The role of religion is to transform the world, to come to see the world as God sees the world and to bring it as close to the vision of God as we possibly can.

Why? Scripture is very clear. "What God changes, God changes through us."

So part of seeing things differently is to:

- Recognise that we usually see from our perspective first.
- That when we are anxious we are limited in our interpretation.
- Staying with this anxiety in the face of the new is to continue to learn from it.
- Transfiguration happens on the way to another place.

4. Transfiguration and prayer

Transformation only happens when we move beyond our inner perceptions, which is what enlightenment means. And an aspect of this is prayer, properly understood and practiced!

Ched Myers writes that:

To pray is to learn to believe in a transformation of self and the world, which seems, empirically, impossible-as in "moving mountains", What is unbelief but the despair, dictated by the dominant powers, that nothing really can change... Jesus urges the disciples ... [to] Keep awake and pray... *Binding the Strong man*, 255

Ched then adds that prayer of this kind is

"the practice of critical reflection upon the 'demons within' n. Is not prayer the intensely personal struggle within each disciple, and among us collectively, to resist the despair and distractions that cause us to practice unbelief, to abandon the way of Jesus? And has not this demon, so embedded in our imperial culture, not kept us impotent, docile subjects of the status quo "since childhood"? (256)

Conclusion

Yet, as in this following experience, transfiguring moments are always surprising, out of our control, yet liberating and make human life more human.

It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured. I realised, somehow, through the screaming of my mind, that even in that shackled, bloody helplessness, I was still free: free to hate the men who were torturing me, or to forgive them. It doesn't sound like much, I know. But in the flinch and bite of the chain, when it's all you've got, that freedom is a universe of possibility. And the choice you make, between hating and forgiving, can become the story of your life. (*Gregory David Roberts, Shantaram*, 3)