

Readings for the Sunday before Lent

15th February 2026

First Reading: Exodus 24:12-18

The LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’ So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Second Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Gospel: St Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

A Reflection for the Sunday before Lent

from Rev'd David Coleman

That hitherto rather obscure word “Transfiguration” re-entered our vocabulary with the birth of Harry Potter: as the magical process of turning one thing into something else. A radical version of recycling, repurposing, as it were. But with this proviso. The New Sky and New Soil in the book of Revelation are made **from what has been**. Creation is not single-use. Nor is prophecy. Nor the treasured components of our living faith in Christ.

The **Bible** -, to the chagrin of theologians - spends little time on ***Creation from Nothing At All***. Yes, we acknowledge God as Initial Creator from day one, though the remaining thousand pages are concerned with: - evolving relationship; -the liberation from injustice; -the life-giving cycles, with the word of God like the rain and the snow, the sustaining, and in Christ, fellow-suffering God. Not just transfigured but risen, re-lifted, to be with us to the end of the age.

JK Rowling didn’t elaborate the ***ethics of transfiguring*** an animal into an object, a living being to an inert object, but that, tragically, is key collective magic of humanity which retards our response to the suffering of Life on Earth, of which, of course, we are ourselves inescapably part. The magicks our species wields, for good or ill, involve word and action, attitude and economics. And stories, like that saucy transfiguration effected by the loudmouthed child of the Emperor’s **-or maybe today president’s** - New Clothes. The key to that tale is that as long as everyone else keeps quiet, the outrage carries on.

It is visions, stories, spirituality and relationships which shift us or stay us, in a way that even the most impeccably peer-reviewed facts and figures seem unable to achieve without some narrative, some ***additional trustworthy personality***. Our Moses, our Elijah. As permission-givers to believe what you seem to see. To reassure you that your faith and heritage has a role to play in the immediate challenges of your day. In the blurred and distorted vision, of some, and tragically for the Earth, their Moses, their Elijah will be a president, or some lesser-suited liar, berating Jesus. Talking ***at***, not with. Because this would not be a conversation. Peddling a lethal denial of the crisis, pretending to have the nation’s wellbeing at heart. They may well dazzle. But will they speak to your heart? Jesus amply warned against false prophets including those who might take his name in vain; the Epistles implore us to test the spirits.

So what about us, here in this mountain-top gathering, where in a few minutes, we will meet that same Christ in bread and wine? The one who told us to read the signs in the skies and on the Earth. And how does that ***not*** mean take note of climate crisis? What are our churches, these houses of good news, and reminders of permission given for love, compassion, justice? What, ***as a minimum*** are our Christian communities but homes for subversive stories? For momentary visions which sustain us to live life lovingly when we come down? Picture-houses of the parables of Jesus which like the vision on the mountain, equip us to see differently.

Or they do as long as we don’t water them down with squeamish translations, substituting “*people*” for “*all life on Earth*.” Or feeling content to teach that Christ dying to save sinners must not include the scope of the species ***who are endangered*** by sin. But hear this: it’s cause and effect, rather than what “just happens!”

In this crisis of Nature and Climate, when we’ve spent a couple of centuries weaving diaphanous Emperor’s robes of human supremacism, rather than good shepherd’s tweed of the servant kingship of Christ ... in these

days it might be God, or it might be non-human nature who calls out the fraud and injustice. Shouting in desperate rage expressed in global extremes of weather, of extinctions ten thousand times a natural rate, glaciers going, seas surging, and so much more that to enumerate the dimensions of the mess we're in would use more time than we're given.

And maybe that other tradition makes sense: to epitomise Peter as the church, when he faffs around with tradition, to petrify a moment given only to be a moment. The Jewish feast of booths seems to be referenced here, and in the account in Luke, the writer adds "***he did not know what he was saying***". This too fits so well with churches' initial responses to the climate crisis, as if the pre-crisis stewardship Christianity of the twentieth century could possibly be enough: - that spirituality of love for God sanitised of love for your more than human neighbour. Dutifully looking after God's property, rather than learning from fellow creatures as teachers. And the God-given complexity of ecosystems that replenish life where monocultures exhaust and deplete. Learning as did the sower in the parable, that birds and weeds go together with a wholesome harvest. As did Solomon, the Wise, as did Job the Righteous, as did Christ the Loving in constant contact with nature, filled with affection and awe.

That stewardship role, whilst it once seemed a progressive alternative to monstrous exploitation, just doesn't get us far enough up the hill. Doesn't get us into that cloud. Doesn't get us ***out*** of the booths Peter wants to build. Doesn't bring us face to face with David Attenborough or Greta Thunberg or whoever it is whose blessing you would need to put our love for faith and Creation together and make Christ.

In a conversation with Philip Peacock, now General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, he agreed: "*the language of stewardship places us over and above the rest of creation and is indeed part of the problem for the crisis we are in.*" Rather than "*loving, listening to and fiercely protecting the Creation we also are*" - and that's from James Bhagwan, the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of churches, who also said that Christianity amplified and completes his indigenous spirituality as a Pacific islander. As one whose mother tongues, like Biblical Hebrew, simply do not make that absolute and increasingly harmful distinction between a living being who is human any other living being.

I'm encouraged that when I raised this face to face with the lady who's now Archbishop of Canterbury, she certainly seemed to listen. Meantime, thank God, wherever we see how the spiritual fruit of care for Creation tends ***towards*** that sort of transfiguration experience. People who love the Earth ***will*** love and listen all the more to Christ. Finding Christian Scripture and tradition in their deeper identities if not "dazzling white", then verdantly green. Moving towards that day when, as global youth suggested, when "***they will know we are Christians by our love for Creation***". Pray, friends, for that day. Live and work for it.

So: what the disciples were privileged to see of Jesus was rather ***more*** than they were ready for; what ***we*** seem hell-bent on blinkering ourselves into, is rather ***less*** than the needs of the Earth require. But alongside Moses and Elijah, Saint Francis, recycled by Pope Francis showed us Earth as a "ruler", on whom we depend. As well as a dearly beloved and mutually caring relative. ***Earthself*** in the tapestry of love and trust that shifts us. Or not.

Pope Francis pulled off that trick of recycling in time to the 2015 Paris climate conference. It still helps open the eyes of any church not cowering behind a Berlin wall of sectarian entrenchment. Like the transfiguration of Jesus, that moment cascades on.

Last year I headed uphill to an extremely ecumenical conference in Assisi, celebrating both 800 years since these words were first sung, but also 1500 years since the Nicene creed, affirmed, as churches of most traditions agree, that God is the maker of one single unified and interactive Creation, heaven-and-earth, sky-and-soil, including realties which are both seen and unseen. The main task of that Assisi gathering was not to pay lip-service either to Saint or **Pope** Francis, who had died a week or so previously, but to help churches respond to the terrifying facts and openly obvious causes of the crisis of nature and climate, with whose impacts some other nations are even more urgently familiar.

To respond not by departing from what it means to be disciples of Christ, as if tradition, scripture and prophecy were toothless and single-use. We respond in faith not by being less who God gives us to be, but rather by being more so. To discover how green church is more church. And even that more church, with integrity is greener.

This is a transfiguration which affirms, rather than discards. Which gives life rather than takes it. Which honours tradition and scripture in the most terrifying way possible - by taking them seriously as exceptionally valuable resources for times of trial, fulfilled to the glory of God and to the health of the Earth.

The good news is that a sustainable life is likely to be a better and a happier one too. The Church exists to bring ***Good News to every creature.***