

Order of Service 14/2/21 Transfiguration

Opening verse

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice,
"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Mark 9:7

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship

Natalie

Welcome wherever you are today during this snap lockdown to this livestreamed service from BUC – there are 5 of us here this morning making this happen and others will be joining us from their homes via prerecorded video. It is Transfiguration Sunday and we will reflect on what light this strange story sheds on the recent Victorian legislation to prohibit Gay Conversion Therapy.

Ian places the bible and light candle as Natalie is saying the following...

Here in this place new light is streaming
and the darkness is vanished away
In this space our fears and our dreamings
can be brought to God, and into the light of day
May God Gather us in, lost and forsaken
May God Gather us in, blind and the lame
May God Call to us now.
Let us awaken
Let us arise at the sound of our name.

Let us sing these words as we worship God together.

Opening Song

Song: Gather Us In. TiS474

Here in this place new light is streaming,
Now is the darkness vanished away,
See in this space our fears and our dreamings,
Brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in the lost and forsaken,
Gather us in the blind and the lame.
Call to us now and we shall awaken,
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

2. We are the young - our lives are a myst'ry,
We are the old who yearn for your face,
We have been sung throughout all of history,
Called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in the rich and the haughty,
Gather us in the proud and the strong,
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
Give us the courage to enter the song.

4. Not in the dark of buildings confining,
Not in some heaven light years away,
But here in this place the new light is shining,
Now is the kingdom, now is the day.

Gather us in and hold us forever,
Gather us in and make us your own,
Gather us in all peoples together,
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

SONG: Gather us in by Marty Haugen, © 1983 by G.I.A. Publications, Inc.
from Together in Song, Harper Collins *Religious* WORD OF LIFE

Acknowledgement of Country

Natalie

We acknowledge and respect
the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation,
the traditional custodians of this land
since time immemorial.
We are learning that the land
is not ours to own, but to look after;
and that if we listen,
we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.
***Responding to this call, we commit ourselves
to work for justice, reconciliation,
and care of the earth.***

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Natalie

Let us pray

Creator God, you spoke, and the earth was formed.
Creator, Christ and Spirit, together,
You are the source of all that is.

In every day, and in every moment, you are still speaking,
And in all that has beauty, your love shines.
In the loud crack of lightning,
In the beating wings of a dove,
In the unfamiliar face of a stranger,
Your love shines.

God on high, you do not keep silent.
Creator, Christ and Spirit, together, you are with us in our daily lives.

In every day, and in every moment, you are still speaking,
And in the midst of all that is broken, your love shines through.
Through your cries for justice,
Through your call to compassion,
Through your experience of suffering,
Your love shines.

God of justice, Compassionate Spirit, Suffering Christ,
Forgive our blindness, when we have been indifferent to others,
When we have failed to see you in the face of the stranger.
Forgive our inaction, when we have felt the call to serve,
but have turned away.
Forgive our sin, when we do not see your light shining in the darkness,
calling us to follow.

Help us turn to you, help us see your love shining before us.

[a bit of silence]

Amen.

Sisters and brothers, it is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness". God's love is light that transforms the darkness, letting old things pass away and bringing new life through Christ. Hear the good news, our sin is forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

Gospel Reading: Mark 9:2-9

Maxine

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

With the Children

Dave

Dave and Clara enjoy a game of table tennis and explore the three pillars of Mark's Gospel - baptism, transfiguration and crucifixion - when Jesus is named as the Song of God.

Song: Child of God

O Child of God made in Christ's image,
May you know the joy of God's love.
O Child of God touched by the Spirit,
May you grow in grace, hope and peace.
O Child of God

*Loved by God, held by God
may He sustain you.
This child of God.
Known by God, knit by God
may She delight in you.
This child of God, this child of God.*

Child of God, made in Christ's image,
May you know the joy of God's love?
Child of God, touched by the Spirit,
May you grow in grace, hope and peace.
O Child of God

Child of God, by Elaine Loukes, used with permission

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mal Rowe

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Reflection 1 - Stuck-In-The-Middle Theology

Ian

It is a significant moment in religious history when a government legislates against theology. And that is what happened last week in the Victorian parliament when a bill was passed to prohibit so called Gay Conversion Therapy – an activity that rests on a particular understanding of who God is. Many churches have been up in arms about this legislation, seeing it as a dire threat to religious freedom. This morning I'd like to talk about why I support the legislation from a theological perspective. And then I'm going to invite Anthony to talk to us about what it means to him. Anthony has spoken to us before about how he suffered this treatment for many years.

In thinking about this, I was inspired by the recent article by Rev Alistair Macrae, Uniting Church minister, past President of the Church, leader over many years of the UCA's discernment on issues of sexuality, previous minister of this congregation and friend to many of us (end of disclaimer). Al's article was a justification of his decision to return his Order of Australia medal because of Margaret Court's elevation to a higher award despite her anti-LGBTQIA+ views. Al wrote: *As a minister and theologian, I am aware that bad theology kills people. Bad theology underpinned the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. Bad theology supported Hitler's racist ideology and the evil it produced. Bad theology underpinned or failed to recognise the racist assumptions behind the destructive program of colonisation not least in this land. Bad theology continues to alienate and oppress sexual minorities. The upgrading of Mrs Court's award will rub salt into these wounds.* Bad theology, misunderstanding and misrepresenting God, making God in the image of our own fears and prejudices – all this can do great harm, it can even kill.

I think Jesus would agree. Today's gospel story, the Transfiguration, which occurs right in the middle of Mark's gospel, is one that is highly susceptible to bad theology. Which is why, I think, as they are coming down from the mountain, Jesus orders his disciples to tell no one about what they had seen. Because frankly, Jesus looked like God up there, didn't he? – glowing with divine glory, chatting with heavenly beings, not to mention his recent God like acts: overcoming the powers of evil, healing the sick, calming the storm, walking on the sea, raising the dead (Boring 264). If we didn't already know how the story ends, we might think at this point in the gospel, that Jesus is like some fantasy sci-fi magical divine superhero about to blast the earth into peace. Jesus as divine superhero. Common theology. Bad theology. And Jesus says, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen here. Because it is not the whole picture."

I call this divine superhero approach "stuck-in-the-middle" theology. It says, "God is all powerful, dwelling in exalted, all revealing, light. And we have to be perfect to approach that lofty mountaintop. And perfection means keeping the rules, conforming to an ancient ethical ideal." Stuck-in-the-middle theology overemphasises power and leads to moralistic, patriarchal, homophobic legalism. And if you have suffered the abuse of such religion then thank you for still being here, for still believing that there is more to faith than this and that healing is possible for us together.

I understand why some people say there is no good theology, any and all theology is bad – I get it because of the great harm that has been and continues to be done in the name of Jesus – Gay Conversion Therapy being but one example. And if we are to make good theology and live by it, then we need to proceed with great humility and repentance. We need to follow Jesus down from the mountaintop and see where he takes us.

Earlier Dave and Clara alerted us to the fact that Mark's gospel rests on 3 theological pillars, three places where Jesus is named Son of God – one at the beginning, one in the middle (the Transfiguration) and one at the end. I call the divine superhero approach "stuck-in-the-middle" theology because it does not take account of the third pillar, the cross. It overemphasises supernatural power, ignoring the humility, vulnerability and self-giving of divine love.

If we get stuck in the middle of the gospel, teetering on the mountaintop of glory, then the weight of what is to come – human vulnerability, suffering and death – risks bringing the whole thing crashing down – for how can there be an all-powerful God when innocent people continue to suffer so?

On Golgotha, hanging on the cross, killed by the bad theology, the legalism of his day, Jesus is named Son of God, not by a voice from heaven as previously, but by his executioner – an outsider, a Gentile, a man of violence – someone who has seen none of the mountaintop glory, none of the divinely empowered miracles, but only a suffering, broken human being hanging on a cross. He sees the presence of God, in humanity's most vulnerable moment.

If God in Christ is just about power over us, then expecting people to conform to an ancient view of human sexuality becomes possible. But what does it look like if we see God present in the humanity and vulnerability of the other? – God present in the joys and struggles of their living and loving? What does it look like if rather than imposing a random divine will upon the other, we seek to meet the divine within them? God give us such eyes to see.

And finally, what about religious freedom? That's a whole other reflection, but let's just note in passing that in the New Testament, Christ's freedom means freedom from legalism, freedom from the oppression of corrupt religion, freedom for the marginalised and excluded, freedom to belong in God's family, to be a child of God in the fullness of one's humanity.

I see the Victorian Anti-Gay Conversion Therapy legislation as a step towards that freedom.

Now let's hear what Anthony feels about it.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/faith-rattled-in-australia-day-honours-20210127-p56x9m.html>

Reflection 2

Anthony

Around 10.30 pm on Thursday 4 February 2021, the parliament of the state where I live affirmed to me that I am not broken, and I do not need healing, changing or fixing. Neither do my lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, or gender-diverse friends. Not only that, it affirmed that those who might try to heal, change or fix me, or us, would do real and serious harm in the process, and that this must be prohibited by law, with significant penalties attached.

In doing so, it took another huge step in a journey that began with the decriminalising of homosexuality in 1980 and included a state apology, delivered by the Premier in 2016, for convictions under unjust laws that criminalised homosexual acts.

So, what does it mean for me, a victim-survivor of so-called conversion therapy? I feel that the state has seen me for who I am, affirmed me in that, and sought to protect me, just as I am. As someone who deeply respects the social contract that binds governments with the governed, this is huge. It crowns and makes explicit the much broader change where our society has recognised, 'we got it wrong and now we're trying to make it right for LGBTIQ+ people'. In this, the government's voice may be the last, but it's also the loudest.

As well as feeling validated and protected, my thoughts have turned to those who sought to change me all those years ago, and who I suspect still believe this bad theology. Are they still active in this? Will they respect this new law? Should I reach out to them? Can I do so with compassion to moderate my anger? Do they still adhere to such judgemental dogma, and why? Can I help protect someone else in my shoes?

All this reinforces to me that, while this bad theology didn't kill me like it has so many others, it did do me real harm. And that is why the passing of this legislation is so important.

Reflective Music

Song: Child of God (BUC Song Project - Elaine Loukes)

O Child of God made in Christ's image,

May you know the joy of God's love.

O Child of God touched by the Spirit,

May you grow in grace, hope and peace.

O Child of God

*Loved by God, held by God
may He sustain you.
This child of God.
Known by God, knit by God
may She delight in you.
This child of God, this child of God.*

Child of God, by Elaine Loukes, used with permission

Song

Song: God Version 1.0 (Robin Mann)

1. I don't believe in a God up in the sky,
Who sits in heaven and never hears me cry.
I don't believe in a God who's far away -
I believe in Jesus living here with us today.
2. I don't believe in a watchmaker above,
Set this world going but now is not involved,
Who from a distance is watching as we fall -
I believe in Jesus' God who suffers with us all.
3. I don't believe in a God who keeps a shop,
Who checks each item and puts a price on top,
Who wants a dividend on each investment made -
God is always giving and refuses to be paid.
4. I don't believe in a tyrant on a throne,
Who wants to punish us for every wrong we've done,
Who keeps a tally of each mistake and crime -
God wants to have mercy on us each and every time.
5. I don't believe in a patriarchal chief,
A judge who never had mercy on a thief,
The Lord and Master who must be waited on -
God is mother-sister just as much as Father-son.
6. God is beside us, God has no other home,
No other family, we are God's flesh and bone;
He-she is with us and with all humankind -
Loving her creation always occupies his mind.

SONG: God Version 1.0, from God Version 1.0, © Robin Mann 1998,
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Prayers of the People

Ian

From the radiant mountaintop of prayer we ask for God's blessing of light upon the world, the church and all in need.

God send your blessing of light on the earth and all its creatures ...

Light tapers

Shine for them with the light of your creative love.

God send your blessing of light on nations and peoples, especially those experiencing political violence and those battered by the pandemic ...

Light tapers

Shine for them with the light of your justice and peace.

God send you blessing of light on all those who are ill or struggling in other ways, especially under lockdown ...

Light tapers

Shine for them with the light of your healing.

God send your blessing of light on all who are grieving, all who have lost loved ones ...

Light tapers

Shine for them with the light of your comfort and peace.

We sing God's blessing of light for the church of Jesus Christ, where it is persecuted, where it is complacent, where it is struggling, where it is thriving ...

Light tapers

Shine for us with the light of your hope, joy and communion.

We pray in Jesus name and in his words:

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.***

Notices

Ian:

- Ash Wednesday
- Sunday Chat

Sending Song

Christ be our light ATO 314

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

*Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Natalie and Ian

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others
Walls made of living stone.

5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

SONG: Christ be our light, by Bernadette Farrell, from All together okay,
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Blessing and Sending

Ian

Go now to shine with peace, love, hope and joy in your living.

And may God the Source of the light
shine in your hearts,
may Jesus Christ the bearer of the light
illumine your way,
and may the Holy Spirit
give you eyes to see by the light.

Thank you

Liturgist:
Natalie Sims

Children's time
Clara Hall

Dave Hall
Children, Youth & Young
Adult Pastor

Bible readings:
Maxine Loynd
Mal Rowe

Reflection:
Rev. Ian Ferguson
(Minister of the Word)
Anthony Hinds

Musicians:
Glenice Cook
Joel Hallinan
Elaine Potter
Catherine Simone
Natalie Sims
Daniel Whelan
Shawn Whelan

God Version 1.0
from Robin Mann's album
God Version 1.0
(used with permission)

Prayers of the People:
Ian Ferguson

Production:
Jane Allardice
David Cameron
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron
Shawn Whelan

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6