

Transfiguration (Sunday before Lent) – The World of Glory **2 Peter 1.16-21, Matthew 17.1-9**

We all live in multiple different worlds. Those of us who grew up in a language or culture other than the dominant one where they live know what it's like to move between worlds every day. Young people code switch throughout the day, with one language for peers and online chat and a completely different set of social rules for adults and formal situations. Our workplaces and sports teams and churches all have jargon and codes and expectations that sometimes overlap but often don't.

This week I read a reflection on grief by Ross Palethorpe, a trauma and bereavement counsellor.¹ He talks about grief as its own world. "A place" he says, where "time moves differently...the colours are wrong...The air can feel suffocatingly thick, or so thin that no inhale ever seems enough." Meanwhile, "back in the real world, the laundry always needs doing. The dogs are politely reminding us that dinner was due three minutes ago..." The unfamiliar grief world and the familiar everyday world are not separate from each other. They "exist in tandem, [their] borders invisible and overlapping."

This is true not only for those who have lost loved ones, but for all who bear witness to terrible things. The world of grief is a place we go to when we let ourselves be affected by all the fears and losses that are part of living in a troubled world.

Palethorpe says that the art of living with grief is being able to move back and forth between the world of grief and the everyday spaces of our lives.

"In order for us to grieve," he says, "we must become dual citizens. We must consciously spend time in that alien world, feel the loss, explore its landscapes and...then walk back through the gate and into the everyday world," letting go "of the idea that we can only exist in one place."

¹ In David Farrier's Webworm blog, February 8 2026

The Gospel narrative of the Transfiguration offers us a glimpse of yet another world that exists in tandem with our everyday world. I call this the “world of glory.” Like the world of grief, it is mostly hidden from our everyday experience. But unlike the world of grief, the world of glory is larger, stronger, and more real than anything we experience in what we like to call the “real world.”

In the story, Jesus and his closest friends head up a mountain, and suddenly Jesus begins to shine with a radiant light, long dead saints become visible to the astonished disciples and a terrifying voice speaks from a cloud. It’s not that God did some weird magic trick that made Jesus glow and resuscitated Moses and Elijah from the distant past. Rather, in this event a veil was drawn back to allow Peter, James and John to enter an extra-dimensional reality that is always present, but that we don’t normally have access to.

Just as those who are acquainted with grief are dual citizens, those who live in the Spirit are also citizens of another world. To the extent that we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we move back and forth between our normal reality, and this “world of glory” that permeates all things. This spiritual world occupies the same physical space as our normal world, but the experience of it can be disorienting, unclear, and sometimes frightening.

Peter speaks of wanting to set up three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah – an attempt, perhaps, to keep hold of this experience. But we can’t take up residence in the world of glory or make it permanent. Those who try to can often seem deluded or manipulative in their triumphalist insistence that they hold the key to God’s presence and power.

The framing of dual citizenship invites us simply to be open to the “more” that shimmers around the edges of our reality, letting it permeate our everyday world even if just in glimpses. In this life, we are guided by spiritual insights that are like “a lamp shining in a dark place.” But we trust that in time there will be a more complete revelation, when “the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1.19)

We express our citizenship in the “world of glory” in practices of prayer, and by participating in the mission of Jesus revealed on the mount of transfiguration.

Sam Wells writes about a “prayer of transfiguration” as an approach to praying for ourselves or others in need or crisis. We might normally pray through the lens of resurrection (asking for a miracle to make things better) or incarnation (praying for God to accompany and support a person in their trial). But the prayer of transfiguration asks for the “reality within and beneath and beyond what we thought we understood” to come to the fore and transform the situation into something holy. Wells invites us to ask: “[God], make this trial and tragedy, this problem and pain, a glimpse of your glory, a window into your world. Let me see your face, sense the mystery in all things, and walk with angels and saints. Bring me closer to you in this crisis than I ever have been in calmer times. Make this a moment of truth, and when, like your disciples, I cower in fear and feel alone, touch me, raise me, and make me alive like never before.”²

Practices of contemplative prayer can also help us move back and forth between the everyday world and the world of glory, tuning our hearts to receive the glimpses of heaven that wait at the edges of our perception, even in the dishes, even in the laundry.

Participation in the world of glory involves getting to grips with the meaning of this transfiguration event, remembering that the beloved Son of God gave himself up for us, in a mission to heal and restore humanity that led to the mount of crucifixion. “Glory” doesn’t mean “winning” in a worldly sense, it means the depth of God’s utter commitment to be with us and liberate us, and God’s willingness to undergo unimaginable suffering to achieve that. So the world of glory sometimes – perhaps often – intersects with the world of grief, but it’s what gives us, as Christians, the strength to engage in resistance and hold onto hope in the midst of trouble and heart-break.

² An article in *The Christian Century*, 2014 (available online)

In a sermon on this Gospel text St Augustine calls to Peter to come down from the mountain where he's received this amazing insight into who Jesus is – not to build tents on the mountainside but to “come down, to labour on the earth; on the earth to serve, to be despised, and crucified on the earth.”³

This is another way of talking about moving between the worlds – we can't live with our head in the bright cloud but must come “down to earth” – and do that in a very particular way, in solidarity with the despised, joining in Jesus' liberating mission even if that means enduring rejection and hostility. The transfiguration wasn't an “empty spectacle,”⁴ it had specific meaning and it pointed towards Jesus' purpose. When we are granted moments of transfiguration we should expect to be called into that same purpose, lived out in everyday actions of resistance to all that would dehumanise us and others.

So, as we move towards Lent, let's consider what kind of fasting, what kind of pruning, what kind of discipline we need to enable us to grow more sensitive to, and to move between, the overlapping worlds that are present to each moment of the day. What will support us to reach Easter as eye-witnesses to the glory of the Lord?

The Rev'd Brenda Rockell
15 February 2026

³ Quoted in Andrew McGowan, Substack article on the Lectionary readings

⁴ Andrew McGowan again.