

## **SERMON: 3 March 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **Transfiguration Sunday**

#### **“Being transformed into Christ” (Luke 9:28-36 and 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2)**

I can only imagine that what Peter, James and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration was truly mind blowing. They must have realised that Jesus was more than just Jesus of Nazareth, the Carpenter. They surely couldn't have imagined what might happen when they climbed that mountain to pray.

I know amazing things happen when people pray, and maybe that's an important point for me to emphasise. Prayer changes things. Great things can happen through prayer. Great battles are won on our knees so to speak.

But this. This was extra ordinary. Jesus was lit up like lightning. And time was thrown out the window as Moses and Elijah appear in glorious splendour.

And then Luke tells us that Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory.

What, they were sleepy, and gradually woke up!

Maybe there is something here about there being a realm of existence to which people need to be woken up to?

Actually I think a lot of our faith in Christ is about us becoming aware or wakening up to truth. WE see dimly but we begin to see more clearly.

I think this transfiguration story is about what people see and how people see things.

I don't know about you, but I feel like my faith is changing all the time. It seems to change when I meet certain people and hear their story or if I read something that makes me think.

I've been challenged by Richard Rohr's new book called 'The Universal Christ'. It's really challenged my previous understanding of believers and non believers. It's rocked a few certainties, and that's not a bad thing because I've found that its not always good to be too certain.

Some of the things he has said has challenged me to see things differently. But I'm discovering that there's something deeply truthful about his theology which I know is helping to shape my own understanding of who God is and how God exists. We need teachers to teach us. And we can know when its truth that's coming through.

For example, here's something he says in the book.

"The whole of creation is the beloved community, the partner in the divine dance. Everything is the 'child of God'. No exceptions. All creatures must in some way carry the divine DNA of their Creator" (Rohr).

If I was to summarise what he means by this, I might say that he simply suggests that we need to begin to see Christ everywhere. It's wakening up or seeing more clearly how things are truly.

Rohr says [SLIDE] "We need to look at Jesus until we can see the world with his eyes. In Jesus Christ, God's own broad, deep, and all-inclusive worldview is made available to us."

Christ is the light that allows people to see things in their fullness.

*A mature Christian sees Christ in everything and everyone else.*

Rohr again [SLIDE] "The point of the Christian life is not to distinguish oneself from the ungodly, but to stand in radical solidarity with everyone and everything else. This is the intended effect of the Incarnation—symbolized by the cross, *God's great act of solidarity instead of judgment*. Without a doubt, Jesus perfectly exemplified this seeing and thus passed it on to the rest of history. This is how we are to imitate Jesus, the good Jewish man who saw and called forth the divine in Gentiles like the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman centurions; in Jewish tax collectors who collaborated with the Empire; in zealots who opposed it; in sinners of all stripes; in eunuchs, astrologers, and all those "outside the law." Jesus had no trouble whatsoever with *otherness*. In fact, these "lost sheep" found out they were not lost to him at all and tended to become his best followers."

[SLIDE] "there has never been a single soul who was not possessed by the Christ, even in the ages before Jesus existed".

Long before Jesus' personal Incarnation, Christ was deeply embedded in all things—as all things!

[SLIDE] Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.  
Ephesians 1:4,9

[SLIDE] "You are a child of God, and always will be, even when you don't believe it".

Now this has shaken up some of my long held beliefs. Because this sort of language has not always been the way the church, the body of Christ, has seen itself.

[Discussion? What do you think of this idea of evolving faith or of the universal nature of Christ?]

And it's the seeing that is really important. Its about

[SLIDE] How we see things.

We're given light so that we can see. But I don't think the Church has always had enough light to see with. That's why the Church hasn't always got it right in the past.

Rohr says, "Light is less something we see directly and more *something by which we see all other things*. When Jesus Christ calls himself the "Light of the World" (John 8:12), he is not telling us to look just at him, but to look out at life with his all-merciful and non-dualistic eyes. [SLIDE] We see him so we can see *like him*—with the same infinite compassion".

Christ is our light!. Christ as the Light within us, is the means by which we are to see all things.

And this is how we change, or how we are transfigured, because we see all things in and through Christ now.

If we see our world as us surrounded by sinners in a fallen world then it will be difficult for us to see Christ in all things. This selective seeing is destructive.

Again, Rohr says, "This way of seeing makes us feel separate and competitive, striving to be superior instead of deeply connected and in search of ever-larger circles of union".

"This Divine Presence always seeks connection and communion, not separation or division—*except for the sake of an even deeper future union*".

[SLIDE] *I believe God loves things by becoming them. God loves things by uniting with them, not by excluding them.*

We might summarise this by saying with Paul that the aim of life is that we see that ...

[SLIDE] "There is only Christ. He is everything and he is in everything" (Colossians 3:11)

Or again,

[SLIDE] "I live no longer, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)

So Richard Rohr's theology fits with Paul's understanding of Christ being everything and in everything. So I shouldn't be surprised when I read him saying things like we need to recognise Christ in every person we meet, in every living creature that inhabits this world, in every species of plant and in every tree, and in every star in the sky. For all things were made through Christ, for Christ, and are one with him.

[This is something else that Rohr argues that because Christians have not paid attention to the Mystery of Christ embedded in every element of our planet. We continue to pollute and ravage the earth because our idea of God has not included or honoured the physical universe. And as a result the world doesn't take Christianity seriously. It's so important for Christians to take a lead in loving and caring for the environment].

Which is another challenge that Rohr puts in his book when he says that (you and)

I have never been separate from God, nor can I be, except in my mind. (this is a reference to Romans 8:38-9 - nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord).

If its true that we only ever think we are separate from God, then the solution would be to stop thinking!

I can get that because I can see that being in Christ isn't a rational thing but it's what we are. We just need to stop over thinking it and just feel it, experience it, know it in a real way, we might even say, in a sub-conscious way.

So I can say that I can see now that in Christ, all of creation is one with God, one with the divine. I'm wakening up to what being in Christ means. And I think this is what God wants us all to see. Actually maybe you already this and its just me that is only now getting around to it!

Remember when Moses came down the mountain from being with God and his face shone so brilliantly with the glory of God. But after a while the glory would fade and Moses had to put a veil on his face to stop the people from gazing at it as the radiance faded away.

I think we know we're like Moses, the glory fades the longer we THINK we're apart from God (remember, we can never be apart from God, only in our thinking).

But things like trouble and hardship, and pain and grief, and wrong ways of living can cause the glory to fade or another way of saying that might be to hamper our ability to see properly, to see as Christ sees.

Yet even in those times, the Spirit is calling us back and drawing us deeper in.

**[SLIDE] “the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image” (ever increasing glory)  
(2 Corinthians 3:18)**

Yes there will be a necessary dying to stuff but there is also a glorious rising with the Risen Christ in his glory.

[SLIDE] Your crucifixion with Christ has severed the tie to this life, and now your true life is hidden away in God in Christ. And as Christ himself is seen for who he really is, who you really are will also be revealed, for you are now one with him in his glory!  
(Colossians 3:3-4 TPT)

That dying and rising is at work in us. It's part of the process of becoming transformed into the image of Christ.

When Jesus promised that some of his disciples would not taste death before they would see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27) I think he was pointing, not just to the glimpse that they would get at the Transfiguration, but beyond that to his death, his resurrection, his ascension and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, with the birth of the Church as the Body of Christ glorified.

God is revealing his glory, through all of creation, through me and you, and every other person, and every other creature. Some of us need our eyes opened to see this. That's why we need the Light of the World to help us to see.

And whenever anyone turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away and they can see clearly (2 Corinthians 3:16).

God of light  
Light of the World  
In our union with you  
May all veils be taken away  
May our eyes be opened  
May we see Christ in all things  
May we see the fullness of your glory