

St. Mary's Sermons

Luke 9:28-43

New Living Translation (NLT)

Wow! What a beautiful and amazing reading. It must have been such a special and extraordinary experience, unlike anything that Peter, James, and John had encountered before. I'm sure it was something that they would remember for the rest of their lives. Perhaps they had to pinch themselves, just to make sure that they weren't dreaming!

In front of their very eyes, Jesus had an encounter with his father which resulted in his appearance being transformed and, they saw something of the glory of God. For the Jews, who considered God name to be too holy for them to even pronounce, this must have been a truly mind-blowing moment. The word *transfigured* is sometimes translated as *transformed*. In other words, when we encounter something of the glory of God, we are never the same again, we are transformed closer to the likeness of God.

Jesus is not the only person in the bible to have an encounter with God that transformed them. Here are just a few other examples:

Moses first encountered God in the burning bush. He was told to take off his shoes for he was standing on holy ground. This encounter resulted in him being called to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land.

Moses was particularly blessed that he had more than one personal encounter with God. Years later, having successfully led the people out of Egypt while they were still in the desert on their way to the promised land, he spent forty days with God on the mountain top where, during this time, he received the Ten Commandments. On this occasion, having spent so long in the presence of God, his appearance was changed, and his face shone with the glory of God to such an extent that the people could not bear look at him, but insisted that he cover his face.

Solomon had an encounter with God at the dedication of the temple. The temple was so full of the glory of God that they had to stop the service!

Isaiah also had an encounter with God in the temple which resulted in him acknowledging his own unworthiness and, having been cleansed, he was called to be a prophet.

And of course, perhaps most memorably of all, **Saul** had an encounter with God on the Damascus Road, which resulted in him being temporarily blinded and ultimately, in a dramatic turnaround in his life, with him being called to preach the gospel to the gentiles, instead of persecuting the followers of Jesus.

What has this story in the life of Jesus got to say to us today?

1. An encounter with God changes us.

Being a Christian is not just about believing all the right things about God, but just as importantly, it's about experiencing his transforming power in our lives. God's desire is that we should all have these special moments when we encounter his presence in such a way that our faith in him is strengthened and confirmed and we are encouraged in our daily walk with him.

Each one of us will experience the glory of God in a way that is special and meaningful for us. God does not always speak to us in an audible voice. It quite rare, I've never heard the voice of God. he can even speak to us through other people. For some of us these special moments will occur while we are in church worshipping God. Sometimes, there is just such a tangible sense of his presence when we are worshipping him that, we are, as the hymn writer put it, *lost in wonder love and praise*. For others they may occur whilst enjoying the beauty of God's creation. God delights to surprise us and often meets us in unexpected ways.

I've heard so many encouraging stories of people who have had an experience of God and, like Saul, whose lives have been completely turned around as a result. These include stories of people who used to swear like a trooper, who without them making a conscious decision to stop, finding that they no longer use profane language. Others who have stopped smoking,

drinking, or taking drugs who, much to their surprise, have discovered that they no longer have a desire for these worldly pleasures.

This should not surprise us. Jesus is the only one who truly satisfies the hunger that is deep within us.

2. God often prepares us for difficult times by giving us special moments of encounter with him.

The transfiguration is another key moment in the life of Jesus. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah were talking to him about the events in Jerusalem which would culminate in his death and resurrection. Jesus was about to embark on the most difficult part of his mission to earth. No wonder then that, once again, he needed the affirmation of his father. This encounter with God strengthened and encouraged him as he recommitted himself to being obedient to his father, even if that meant dying on the cross.

This of course was the second time that God audibly spoke to Jesus. The first occasion was at the very start of his ministry. As he came up out of the water of baptism, the voice from heaven clearly affirmed that He was God's son and that the father was pleased with him. Immediately following this we are told that Jesus was led into the desert to be tested by the devil.

We might not like to hear this, but there does seem to be a link between those special moments, when we encounter the presence of God, and a difficult time of testing which often follows shortly afterwards.

Again, this can take many forms. As Jesus comes down from the mount of transfiguration, he was met by the man whose son was being tormented by an evil spirit, which the rest of the disciples had been unable to release him from. Jesus has compassion on the boy and immediately sets him free.

When we have those special mountain top experiences, when we encounter something of the glory of God, it is so tempting to want to stop in that moment. I have a great deal of sympathy with Peter who, when he saw what had happened to Jesus, blurted out, *“lord its good for us to be here, shall I build three shelters for us?”* But God does not give those special encounters for us to boast about, but always to reassure us and prepare and equip us for living in a fallen world.