

Close Encounters..... Sunday before Lent Exodus 34, Luke 9, 2 Corinthians 3

Prayer is a vital part of us moving closer to God

We can do that in all sorts of ways and at any time

Maybe for Lent you could commit to praying for a set time each day, whatever you feel is right

Hopefully you all got a copy of the booklet *Living Like a Refugee at the door*. At the moment it is 1 copy over household but we can get more copies if people want them.

It is produced by Open Doors which is a charity that works with Christians across the world who are being persecuted.

During Advent and all the readings from Isaiah that talked about the Hebrew people being displaced and in exile etc I kept thinking that we have so many displaced people across the world today.

I heard last week that if we take the world population as a whole then 1 in every 122 are currently displaced persons

In the booklet there is a short passage of the Bible to read each day - have your Bibles at hand and then a thought and a prayer.

I would love for as many of us as possible to use these during Lent and learn more about these real people who are living in such difficult circumstances

And on Wednesday evenings we will be spending some time looking a little more at this but also in prayer starting 17th as we have our special Ash Wednesday Service here this week

Encounters with people or animals or events change us!

Close encounters can have a significant impact upon us!

A couple of years ago I was lucky enough to be able to visit a friend living out in Tanzania and we went on Safari for a couple of days. I have always loved elephants but seeing lots at close range, old and young, and then sitting, closer than I am to Ian now, for about 20 minutes just watching and listening to one elephant, my feelings towards them changed and my understanding of their behaviour was deepened.

Moses had the most incredible encounter with God

He was used to talking with God.. Chapter 33 verse 11 says

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

And in today's reading there is something exceptional that happens. The encounter that he had with God this time causes a change in his appearance that Moses himself did not realise until he saw the people's reaction to him.

vs 30 *When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him*

And why was his face shining?

vs 29 *Moses face shone BECAUSE he had been talking with God.*

Moses talked with God face to face

This close encounter led to Moses bearing the glory of God, reflecting His presence

Moses was left with a visible mark of his encounter with God. His face shining with the glory of God

Jesus went up the mountain to pray, taking Peter, James and John with Him

WHILST PRAYING His appearance changed - His face changed and His clothes became dazzling white

Then appearing in glory came Moses, representing the Law of God and Elijah representing the prophets and they spoke of what was going to come for Jesus - His departure at Jerusalem as He fulfilled both the law and the prophets of the Old Testament.

What we don't know here is how long Jesus' face stayed changed or for how long His clothes remained dazzling white but if we were to read on then we know the next day Jesus was recognised by a father whose son was seriously ill.

What we do know is that after Jesus' resurrection, hinted at here by Moses and Elijah, Jesus remains changed, healed and clean and radiant and not immediately recognisable by those who knew Him But the transformation of Jesus happens as He was praying, as He was talking with God

And then a voice from the cloud, the voice of God identifies Jesus as His Son, His chosen one (Vs35) to whom we should listen!

Jesus and Peter, James and John all had an exceptional encounter. Jesus appearance changed and the encounter must have impacted the 3 disciples with Him, surely.

Or did it because in vs 36 it says

they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Surely after something like that their understanding and faith must have changed so that they could not keep all that was happening to themselves?

Well, maybe they still hadn't totally understood at this point just who Jesus was, maybe they hadn't, as Paul would say in Corinthians, totally turned to the Lord and so their minds were still slightly hardened.

I love this passage from Corinthians, partly because it is one of the easier passages of Paul to understand, Sometimes his writings take some unpacking and sorting out

But this one is relatively clear.

I think what Paul is saying is that many of us have minds that are closed off to God, hardened so that we don't understand Him, and we certainly don't radiate His glory like Moses did

Until, that is, we decide to turn and face Him and then the things that shut us off from Him fall away like a veil falls from a brides face and then we can see Him clearly

And as we face Him and open ourselves up to Him, and see something of His glory, He transforms us bit by bit, degree by degree, little by little so that we become a better and clearer image of Him

As we turn to Christ, we get a new hope

His revelation to us transforms us

As we look to Him and move closer to Him our lives gradually become a closer likeness to Christ's never totally like Him until eternity, but our lives become brighter as God, by His Spirit fills more and more of us

And we reflect a clearer image, a truer reflection of Jesus to the world

Not only do we bear the glory of God but we also reflect it out to others so that they too may know the love and glory of God.

Nathan is a guy I have known for about 4 years

His heart was hardened by life, having been in prison and homeless at times and unemployed

He was spiritually blind to God because of some of the things that he chose to do

He was living with his partner and 3 children when I first met him

Because his eldest daughter had insisted, he reluctantly came to church one Sunday when the service was being held in the school.

He fairly begrudgingly came and kept a low profile

At a church weekend away someone prayed with him and he had a significant encounter with God

He started coming to church more willingly and one day decided to turn to face the Lord and was baptised

His mind, and heart have been hugely softened

He and his partner got married in church 18 months ago.

I had the privilege of baptising his eldest daughter a few months before I left Bath

He manages the church community cafe and leads the team of volunteers with great insight and skill

Even his face and demeanour have changed so much so that people he has known for years don't always recognise him in the street

Josh is a teenager who has had some of the most horrific experiences I think a teenager could have and had no experience of church or Jesus

He went to youth group for years and built up trust with our youth worker

One day he and a friend decided to come to church and he began to sing regularly in the worship group

Last summer he went with 12 others to Soul Survivor which is a Christian camp held each August

At one of the meetings he went forward for prayer and had an amazing encounter with God

Later that evening he took off his favourite Zombie T shirt and put on a new Soul Survivor top

When he got back he stood up in church and told us of his experience, of his decision to turn towards God and let Him transform his life

He looked different

He held his head up, he smiled from deep within instead of a tentative shy grin

Prayer and encounter change us

If we turn to face Christ then His glory can begin to transform us and we reflect a more accurate image of God to those around us and in to the world and we have a new HOPE

Mirror & Torch demo..... Mirror = us Torch = Christ

If we keep our backs turned to Christ then there is no reflection

But if we turn to Christ and let God remove the veil that covers us and distorts His image in us then we begin to reflect something of the Glory of God

As we move closer to Him then that image becomes stronger and clearer

Our lives become fuller of Him and brighter with Him

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.