**New Kilpatrick**

**27th February 2022**

**Luke 9:28-36**

**Podcast**

**Centring**

The breath

When it is taken away

Vacates a moment

Leaving it hollowed out

And tissue thin

A place without words

For there are none

To explain

Or describe

But because we have no words

Does not mean it cannot exist

The moss-skinned stone

The lichen-crusted twig

The water-pooled leaf

Fizz

From a brush of heaven

When the moss fulgurates

And the lichen crackles

And the water mesmerises

Yet, in the next breath

The world returns to its everyday grandeur

But the echo shimmers

And our stiffness cracks

In the residue of wonder

**Intro**

How many times have we encountered moments where the world fizzes a little, where we manage to touch, or are touched by, a sense of something greater than ourselves, and the world transfigures, feels different, you come away from it not being able to explain, but sense something shifted, you feel connected to the earth or to the present in a way that take you out of yourself for a short while. A spiritual moment. These moments of transfiguration, these thin places, are where we meet today.

**Reading**

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. **29**And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. **30**Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. **31**They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. **32**Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,[b] they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. **33**Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,[c] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. **34**While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. **35**Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen;[d] listen to him!” **36**When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

**Prayer**

Unimaginable one

Transfigured one

Wholly other one

May we let our imaginations inspire us to seek you,

lift us from the mundane

that we might rise above the clay of our traditions

and find ourselves within touching distance

of what is eternal and sacred.

May we let our eyes unfold for us

the shift on the horizon

that reveals how thin a place this is,

only a whisper away

from holy breath

The whispering presence in our ears

May we let our minds be unbound

and dare see beyond the rules of religion

that we might invite you

who is beyond all things

to call us into your adventure

Here and beyond this place and moment.

May we let our prayers deepen us

not with familiar words and rubrics

but with silences and poetry

That they might find

Those holy places and moments

That lie beyond doctrine and understanding.

May we let our faith stretch us,

calling us from moribund routines

towards the journey into God

Places where we have not yet been

and where the church dares us not to go.

And in such a place

wait,

pause,

linger,

and wonder

In what is yet to be revealed.

Pause

Hear us as we say together

The prayer that unites us

Our Father, who is in heaven

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, the power

And the glory, forever

Amen

**Scripture Introduction**

Today is a day not to explain but recognise the place of wonder that is so vital for our faith. But when we come across the story for the transfiguration, it feels so strange, that the only way to handle it, is reduce it down to what we might be able to understand, read it as a myth, or a story that has grown in the telling, a resurrection story written back into the earlier part of the gospel.

All that has been done many times. But there are other times, and perhaps we should allow them to happen more frequently, when we let the mystery mystify, and allow ourselves to believe in wonder, and apologise less for the imagery and wonder that the bible offers us. What is happening here is really unknown, but it is telling us something, that cannot be explained, and the only way to try and describe what it does to us, is to tell a story that brings these feelings back.

Belief becomes based, not in fact, for faith is not a fact, but is based on that sense of life and wonder and hope and fulfilment these stories bring. Be concerned less for the details, and enjoy more the experience of the story, we who love stories of magic, and sci-fi and watch Downton, none of it is historically accurate, but the story itself brings a sense of what it was like and invites us into the story and become part of it.

So today, we offer a few transfigured places, a number of thin places, as the Celts have named them, places where the distance between earth and heaven is tissue thin. We begin with a retelling of the transfiguration story and then a number of folk from the congregation explore their thin places.

**Retelling**

Mountains have always been special places. Prayer places indeed. Quieter. More rarefied. Fewer distractions. So that is what we thought we were going to do.

It was good to be with Jesus, just the four of us. And we stood in a circle, faces looking up to heaven, feeling the breeze like some whisper of the spirit, as Jesus began to pray.

It was like sun bursting though stained glass, the light changed, grew deeper. But it wasn’t the sun coming though the clouds. It was the words of Jesus, they lit the whole place. Glory cascaded down him. Love poured out from him. Promise seemed to be twist and gyrate in the moment. All the prophets words seemed to fill in with gold, and it was as if I could could even see Moses and Elijah there, encouraging him, hearing their own words, fulfilled and breaking through, I could hear them talk of how this was all going to end, how it was all going to go dark.

And I wanted to capture the moment, making three tents to hold them all, to preserve this insight I had just had and experienced.

But it grew dark, the light faded, the moment sighed, sunk, and we were left in the echo of a voice, like Elijah’s still small voice: uncurling within me: this is my son, listen to him.

And then, it was all gone.

**Linda**

O sing to me of Luskentyre's white sands,

sing of the distant Hebrides,

and in each note I'll hear the whispering wind

searching the machair in a soft lament.

On memory's wings to carry me away

 to a land where sea and sky hold sway,

where the sound of waves on a windblown shore

a wearied soul may wondrously restore.

O sing to me of glistening Luskentyre,

changing with light, now pastel soft, now bold,

with shifting bands of multi-hues, sky blue

 or shades of grey reflecting an approaching storm.

Sweet Summer's shades to monochrome give way,

relentless storms sweep in across the bay.

As winter skies release a deluge drear,

a chink of light will offer welcome cheer,

O sing yet more of Luskentyre's fair strand,

my heart uplifted at such sweet refrain.

The haunting melodies of a thousand years,

etched deep within my soul, there to remain.

With indigo-tinted Taransay in view

across the silver sands, I dream anew.

The wild Atlantic beating on the shore,

here would I gladly bide to roam no more.

**Alistair**

Some years ago, when I was a mere teenager, I went with the Boys’ Brigade Wayfaring Badge class to climb Ben Arthur, better known as The Cobbler, at Arrochar. The hiils were not entirely new to me, as my parents were keen walkers, and we usually ascended at least one hill if not more on family holidays.

Anyway, we slogged our way up the track past the Narnain Boulder and arrived at the top. We sat down to have our snacks and while eating, we watched, fascinated, as a rain shower made its way up Loch Long towards us. We could see the dark cloud, and the rain on the water of the Loch as it came steadily towards us. Then miraculously, the wind strengthened and the cloud and rain was blown back down the Loch. We stayed dry in the sunshine.

I have had several mountain top experiences in the years since, and as a result of standing in, or above, the clouds, I have always been able to see the Transfiguration as an entirely believable experience for the disciples on a mountain top, but without ever understanding what we should take from the story, or why they would want to keep it to themselves. I would have wanted to tell all about it!

**Gillian**

It is a small boat – sailing,

In a warm gentle breeze – just enough to propel you and your boat through the water.

A slight heel and you lie along the lee deck, head to her bow

Looking out - and over into the dark water below.

But close to the hull, the water isn’t dark: it is white and speckled and sparkling with millions of jewels of cascading droplets.

Swish swash, swish swash says the bow wave and you lean out further to capture and keep the sound and the sight and the feel of something that is there – and then not there.

It’s been like that since time began.

And will be again.  But never, ever quite the same.

**Epilogue**

So may we be present to these thin and sacred places. May our skin itch when we come close to such moments and not dismiss, but enjoy, and go deeper, for in such times and places, we are close to God and the holy and the transcendent as the Celts believed.

They were deeply connected to creation. Their routines and rituals were woven through with prayers and caims that wound and sewed the sacred into the everyday. Everything was infused with a light and a sense of what was beyond. Perhaps our more rational understanding of the world after the enlightenment makes less of these moments, but that does not mean they do not happen.

**News**

**Prayers**

Loving God

Of thin places

And fragile ones

Thin places

And vulnerable ones

Thin places

And painful ones

Hear our prayer

For the fragile and vulnerable and painful places

Of the world

Where conflict is happening

Where is still space for bullies who care not

And whose motives are of fear

Hear us pray

That in such places

The thinness between earth and heaven is revealed

And peace is found

And love is touched

And life is renewed

Yet such a prayer seems too simple

For Ukraine and Yemen and Syria

And so we pause

And decide

To do what we can

And make this place

A trysting place

Where we can only model and make real

Your longing for the world

For the fragile and vulnerable and painful places

Of so many places

Of hunger and injustice

And shallow morals and selfishness

Of poverty and uncaring

In our trade and politics and religion

Hear us pray

That the thinness between heaven and earth is revealed

And justice is owned

And truth is outed

And integrity found

And again it feels too simple a prayer

For the environment, and the trafficked, and the hungry

And so we pause

And decide

To live differently here

That we might make real your kingdom

In this place

For the sake of all

Hear us as we bring our family and friends

Our ill and our lonely

Our fear-filled and our forgotten

And in this thin place

Break through the barriers between us

With a love that is generous

And a grace that is strong

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**