

## MOLESCROFT – TRANSFIGURATION

6TH AUGUST 2017

I always think it is rather fitting that it should be a bright sunny morning for the Feast of the Transfiguration which we celebrate today. Jesus takes the inner three of his disciples, Peter, James and John up a mountain and there, in a few moments of dazzling light and awesome power, he is transfigured and revealed to them in his true glory flanked by those towering figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah. By a cruel irony some 1900 years or so later human beings enacted a terrible parody of this feast, one sunny 6<sup>th</sup> August morning, at 8.16am to be precise. Then also in a few moments of dazzling light and awesome power 75,000 men, women and children died instantly as the first atomic bomb airburst over the city of Hiroshima. Thousands more were to die in the aftermath. I know the historical arguments for that event but nothing could make clearer the distinction between creative and destructive uses of power as the Feast of the Transfiguration and the anniversary of the first atomic falling on the same day.

The issue of power and how it is used affects every aspect of our lives. Just look at the news stories on any day you care to choose and I will guarantee that almost everyone of them will have an issue of power at its heart. Whether we are talking of missile tests in North Korea or battles for supremacy in the White House, whether we are talking about the exact clawing back of powers to be achieved by Brexit or the actions of some like President Maduro in Venezuela, whether we are talking about who should decide on the fate

of a terribly sick child or where fracking should or should not be allowed it is all about the exercise of power. Once again these last few days we have witnessed the moving ceremonies to mark the centenary of the Battle of Paschendaele when hundreds of thousands died at the command of politicians and generals.

Issues of power also extend to more personal stories, powers within families, within work places and indeed churches, the power of one individual over another. Those who studies these things tell us that a great deal of sexual violence is less about physical pleasure and much more about someone's ability to impose themselves on another.

So it is perhaps no surprise that Jesus himself, as a man, has to grapple with the issue of power and how he will exercise the undoubted powers which he possesses. So it is that, immediately following his baptism, and before the beginning of his public ministry Jesus is forced by the Holy Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. And what are the temptations about? They are about power, its use and misuse. The Devil tempts Jesus to use his power to relieve his own suffering, to wow people with what he can do, to use the shortcut of earthly power to bring about is Father's kingdom. Jesus rejects all of these. When he emerges on to the public stage he uses his powers to heal, to reconcile, to forgive, to lead people towards a greater understanding of God; in short in gospel language he uses his powers to usher in the Kingdom of God.

It is important to note where the story of the Transfiguration fits into the overall gospel narrative. It comes just before Jesus sets off to Jerusalem for the last time, where he will be arrested, tried and crucified. Peter, James and John are suitably awed by what they witness and want to create some sort of shrine to mark the spot where it happened. Jesus will have none of it. They must come off the mountain top and face the harsh realities of worldly power. There once again Jesus faces those self-same temptations. Will he come down off the cross? Will he summon legions of angels to rout his opponents? Will he even go as far as taking on the priests and the Romans in debate and run rings round them with his understanding of God? No. Instead he will wash his disciples feet, he will remain silent before his accusers. He will take the beating and the spitting and the mockery without retaliation and he will die crucified between two thieves. His power is exercised in humility and service. 'Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered' as the Graham Kendrick hymn puts it. He is the Servant King.

But we may feel that this has very little to do with us. We don't have the power of presidents or kings. We are not called upon to negotiate the future of our nation or to make the agonising choice that the judge in the Charlie Gard case was forced to make. But, of course, we do have power and quite a lot of it, even if it is only exercised in the relatively limited confines of our families, our workplaces and, dare I say it, our churches. And as with all power we can exercise it positively for the good of others, our community, our family or our church. We can exercise it in a Christ-like way to

build up, heal, reconcile and forgive or we can use it to cause division and unhappiness and even conflict. We can use it to bolster our own positions or we can use it to serve.

Let me tell you a little story and I do so not to say, look at me, aren't I wonderful but to illustrate the power we do have even when perhaps we don't recognise it. A week ago yesterday I was in Morrison's early doing my weekend shopping. It was one of those days when members of a local group, in this case an under 14 football team were at the checkouts, offering to pack your bags in return for a donation to their cause. There was a young lad at my checkout and I was obviously his first customer. He was clearly nervous and obviously relieved when I said yes, he could pack for me. After all you have to admire a teenager who can himself up and out for 9.00am on a Saturday morning. Fortunately there was a group leader who showed him how to do it; heavy items at the bottom, lighter items on the top. I waited patiently while he did this and popped a reasonably generous donation into his collecting bucket. He beamed with delight as I went on my way.

Now I could have turned down his offer of help altogether. I could have been impatient because he did it rather slowly or tutted when things weren't put in the bag in the order I would have done. I could have been niggardly in the donation I gave. In short I had the power, at that moment, to make or spoil his day. Imagine how anxious he would have been with the next customer if I had made his life difficult.

So then we have choices every day, sometimes many choices within a single day as to how we will exercise power. Use it badly and we add to the conflict and unhappiness of our world. Use it well, use it as Jesus himself used it and, in however small a way, we help build the kingdom of God.  
AMEN