

**EPIPHANY 5, Year \_\_\_\_\_ Responsibility: Canon Barlow 5<sup>th</sup> February**

"And Jesus said to them: Let us go on to the next town, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out."

Mark 1:38

Peter and the other disciples were probably a bit disappointed with Jesus because He did not stay long in Capernaum where He was so well having so much apparent success. He had healed Peter's mother-in-law of her fever, and the word had spread that a marvelous was in town - so much so that Mark records that "the whole city was gathered together about the door."

We read in the Gospels that on more than one occasion Jesus slipped away quietly when people began to make a fuss over Him, and to demand His attention. It does seem a bit tough on the unhealed sufferers left behind, but obviously there was very much more to our Lord's ministry than healing the sick.

We should be grateful for the relatively recent upsurge of recognition of the Church's role in healing the sick, with the laying-on of hands and anointing coming into almost regular practice. Yet it was the Church's concern for the sick which led to the establishment of hospitals and the whole medical and healing profession. In the middle ages, it was only the monasteries which cared for the sick and injured and wounded, and only relatively recently has society as a whole come to see and accept responsibility. In the mission field and in non-Christian countries in this way, in Christ's name. In our own through the B<sup>u</sup>sh Church Aid Society which for many years staffed and maintained hospitals at Cook and Tarcoola, not the Government. It is not our fault that they are now closed!

Unfortunately, as tends to happen with movements separated from the orthodox Church, the healing of the sick in the charismatic movement has tended to become an all-important focus of activity, relying heavily on emotional excitement for effect. The argument runs that mankind was created to be perfect. Illness therefore is against God's will. Jesus healed the sick and promised things like whatever you ask for in faith will be given you. Therefore prayer for the sick will be answered by the return to health of that person. If there is no return to health, then someone has failed in faithful believing. A dangerous fallacy. This is an oversimplification for the sake of brevity and would probably earn criticism in charismatic circles.

Jesus saw His healing miracles as a part of His overall ministry, and a subordinate feature of it at that, for He could walk away leaving many still to be healed. Our Lord's primary mission - and so ours also - was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Yes, we hate the threat of illness; too often we fear that death might be at the end of it. Yet we will all die sometime, and we must learn to fear separation from God far more than death. Even when a person is completely healed of the illness of the time, that person still has to face death: the leaving of this life has merely been postponed.

We, as Christians, are fortunate in knowing that death is the gateway to eternal life. We have the promise of Jesus who said: "Where I am, you may be also." And: "I go to prepare a place for you." The Book Job wrestles with the problem of suffering, and particularly undeserved suffering. Of course it was written long before Jesus came and taught better, and suffering then was considered to be the result of, and punishment for sin. The idea still lurks with many people today: "I must have done something very naughty to have this happen to me." Forgetting the sufferings of Jesus who was absolutely pure and without taint of sin.

Job, in this story, was a righteous man and maintained his integrity. So why was he so afflicted? The story has no real solution other than "God knows best; God knows what He is doing." "The Lord answered Job out

of the whirlwind: Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you will declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?" In the end Job admits: "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know .... Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 40:6-9 & 42:3,6). It was, in the long unfolding experience of man with God, a stage of recognition that suffering can no longer be thought of as direct punishment for sin. Of course sin can and often does cause pain and suffering - but as a result, not as a punishment.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. He made it clear that sickness and disease are of the kingdom of evil and are to be destroyed. They are in this world - God's world - because so much of this world is in rebellion against its Maker and Sustainer, and as in any warfare the innocent suffer along with the guilty.

The attitude of Jesus to disease is clearly shown in the way He healed the sick as they were brought to Him or as He came across them. In the perfect Kingdom of God there is no sickness, no sorrow, no death. As the Christian works for the establishment of that Kingdom, he must play his part in the attack against sickness and the fight against disease.

But the proclamation of that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" is of far greater importance, for it transcends the pains and perils of this mortal life and lifts us beyond death to the bliss of heaven.

Our prayer for the sick is vitally important, whether it be in our private devotions; in prayer groups; by outward and visible expression through laying-on of hands or Holy Unction. To pray for the sick is not an exclusively Christian activity, of course - it is almost an instinctive human action to be found in all religions and cultures. However the Christian has more than a concern - he or she has a responsibility to follow the example of Jesus, and St. Paul, and the other forerunners in the Faith/

As we pray for healing for ourselves or for another, we need to remember that the principles common to all intercessory prayer apply - intercessory prayers must be seen as subject to that understanding of God's sovereign will which enables us to say: "Nevertheless, Thy will be done." It sometimes happens that the personal urgency of a situation leads to the presumption and misunderstanding that we can demand healing of God.

It is right for us to ask in faith for what we believe to be according to God's will. In cases of sickness, God's will may be the physical healing of the body; but it also may be that the person bears sickness and pain for a time in faith and hope, or that the person is to face death with confidence and peace. The gift of God's grace to face these latter two possibilities may be as much marks of God's love and answers to prayer as the physical healing that has been sought.

It is good and important to accompany intercession with thanksgiving: 'in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' Wrote St. Paul to the Philippians. Thanksgiving expresses our confidence in God's care for us. We may rightly give thanks for the assurance that He hears and answers our prayers, and that He always wills what is for our good. It would be presumptuous, of course, to give thanks in such a way as to suggest that we already know before He reveals His will in action, what His particular will is for us in a given circumstance.

Jesus' words' that is why I came out' in the sentence I have used as my text, refer not merely to His getting up early and going out to pray and then to move on, but to His whole mission in the world. He came out from the Father to proclaim the Good News of the coming Kingdom – that was His main purpose.

Let us by all means seek healing and blessing for the sick in mind, body and spirit, remembering also to give thanks continually to God for all His mercies, even when we cannot see His whole purpose.

Jesus said, 'In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'  
(John 16:33)

**Amen**

**EPIPHANY 6, Year B Responsibility: Canon Barlow 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2006**

**[Based on the Gospel Reading for today viz. Mark 1:40-45]**

"A man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!" (vv.40 & 41)

Superficially, both the Old Testament Reading and the Gospel appointed for today have a simple story of the healing of two men who had contracted the disease of leprosy. The first is the rather offhand cure by the prophet Elisha, requiring a great deal of faith by General Naaman, and the other a typically straightforward act by Jesus without any fuss. And Jesus conforms to the Law by sending the man to the priests to have his cure verified. No mention by the way, of Naaman being sent to the priests - perhaps because he was not an Israelite.

Leprosy, in Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, was not necessarily what modern medicine classifies as leprosy, though no doubt that is included. The old term included many other skin diseases under that heading. Translations of the Bible reflect scholastic doubt about exactly what the particular skin complaint was. The King James Bible for instance, is uncompromising in calling the disease described in the Nook of Leviticus 'Leprosy,' But modern translations use the term 'infectious skin diseases. However in that same version, Naaman's infection is called 'leprosy.' So leprosy it probably was.

Not that it matters the miraculous cure is the important thing. Such diseases, whatever they were, were serious, not merely because of their contagious character, and physically damaging effect, but because they were thought to make the sufferer spiritually unclean, and therefore unfit to participate in the worship and other activities of the community. A person who had any kind of affliction was assumed to have offended God, and was being punished. You remember when the blind young man was taken before Jesus, the question was asked "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind.(John 9:1) Jesus, of course, put the matter to rights. But even today there is still a sneaking suspicion in the minds of some people that when something goes wrong health wise, or a child is born with some deformity, that there involved somewhere along the line. It is always a hurtful thing to imply, and particularly so when the parents are suffering quite enough as it is. The attitude towards lepers in our Lord's day was similar to the attitude of people today towards someone who is suffering from AIDS or some kind of venereal disease. Fairly or unfairly the assumption is made that the afflicted one has been sinning.

So when the leper had to report to the priest, the priest was not acting as a doctor of medicine, but as a doctor of the Law, and he decided about exclusion from the community, and later, if and when the disease healed, about re-admission. Obviously, when the patient was healed, God had decided that he had paid for his sin, and so he could return to public worship and activity. When Jesus sent the man to show himself to the priest, he was not merely conforming to the Law as detailed in Leviticus chapter 14, but more importantly, he was assuring the sufferer that he was also healed of his sins.

In passing we might note the therapeutic value of the reaching out to touch, pat, or hold the hand of someone in distress and trouble. It has something to do with the memory of loving, comforting, patting of an infant by its mother. It is a way of expressing loving concern which is too deep for mere words. You might have experienced the effect of simply sitting and holding the hand of someone you love who is sick in hospital, and even unconscious. Why do people line up at funerals to shake hands with those who have been bereaved, or pat them on the shoulder? It is a non-verbal way of reassuring a person when the right words won't come.

Imagine the psychological effect -let alone the healing aspect - on the leper, when, after months and probably years of not only being in isolation but of actually being shunned, a person reaches out his hand and touches him! Understandably, the healed leper disobeyed our Lord's instruction to say nothing to anyone. This is an interesting feature in a number of St. Mark's accounts of our Lord's healing miracles: Jesus tells the healed person or those nearby not to speak about it, and most times the command is immediately ignored. As well as this leper, He raised the daughter of Jairus from death and told her parents to say nothing (5:43); He healed a deaf and dumb man, and told the observers to say nothing (7:36); He took a blind man outside the village, restored his sight, and sent him home saying: "Do not even enter the village". (8:26) "But the more He did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement." (7:37)

It seems that Mark is portraying Jesus as reluctant to become known as a miracle worker, because people might follow Him just for physical relief and healing, or to see miracles being done. It seems that Mark wants to show that while the Messiah-ship of Jesus is a mystery which must not be prematurely exposed, yet because it is the mystery and wonder of God present and at work in Jesus, it cannot really be suppressed and must come out. It seems that Mark is suggesting that premature revelation of the Messiah-ship of Jesus would detract from its significance which can only be properly understood in the light of the Cross.

The fact that leprosy was equated with sin helps us to see this incident as part of the proclamation of the Gospel of the power of Christ to heal and cleanse the effect of sin. But the term "sin" has lost its power, and much of its meaning in our modern vocabulary. So the phrase "the effect of sin" doesn't worry many of us very much. The Seven Deadly Sins of the traditional listing - Pride, Anger, Avarice, Envy, Sloth, Gluttony, Lust - have all been explained away in terms of psychology. Pride has become Self-fulfillment. Anger is Stress. Avarice is Competitiveness. Envy is Insecurity. Sloth is Inertia. Gluttony is due to defective metabolism. Lust is merely emotional response. And the Church is accused of having encouraged people to be morbidly introspective, with dangerous feelings of guilt about their natural instincts. The uncomfortable truth is this: even if we have abandoned the idea of sin, we have not freed ourselves from the effects of what we no longer call sin. They are still with us. People still suffer from the effects of sin, whatever they call it and however they try to gloss over the ugliness of the word and what it stands for.

A person sins when he or she sees himself or herself as the self-sufficient centre of their universe. All sin springs from this self-centeredness - pride, anger, avarice, envy, sloth, gluttony, lust. From all this, and that freedom starts condition and of our own sinfulness. The healing begins as we humbly kneel before God saying - and meaning it - "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." We might not always recognise it, but this is what we do Sunday by Sunday at worship and particularly here at the Eucharist. We are also rejoicing as we worship, in the knowledge and certainty that He does make us clean and whole; that we are receiving His grace to enable us to stay clean and whole. And this is true freedom.

- AMEN

**[Based on the Gospel for today viz. Mark 2:1-12]**

The great frustration of obtaining medical attention at a city public hospital is the long delay before your turn comes up. And we hear of plenty of people who have to endure pain and inconvenience while they are on "hold". And still we read of wards being closed because of lack of funds, despite the great sums being spent on sporting facilities and New Year's Eve fireworks.

Nevertheless things were far worse in our Lord's day. There were no hospitals, and very little medical knowledge. And such medical treatment as there was, was not available to the general population, other than from simple home-made medicines which relied as much on superstition as on their curative effectiveness.

So when a known healer such as Jesus came into a village he would be besieged by those seeking to be cured and healed of illness and infirmity. They had to act promptly, because Jesus was moving from town to town, and healing was not His main concern. Invalids and handicapped people could only get to Him when He was in their immediate vicinity, so when the chance came it had to be taken without delay. That was why the blind beggar Bartimaeus shouted so vehemently: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." (Mark 10:47). A blind man could not leave familiar ground, and Jesus might never come back that way.

There are other reasons for determination and urgency to get to Jesus. One is the condition of the patient. You remember the incident when a government official rode to find Him: "He begged Him to come down and heal his son, for he was on the point of death." (John 4:47) And there was Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, who besought Him, saying: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." (Mark 5:23)

The incident in today's Gospel also has its note of urgency and determination. Jesus was visiting a house in Capernaum, and such a assembled in the narrow street outside in the hope of seeing Him, that it was quite impossible for the four men carrying their friend on a stretcher to get through the mass of people. Determined not to be beaten, they somehow reached the outside stairway to the flat roof of the little one-storey building, removed some of the roofing, and triumphantly lowered the patient to the very feet of Jesus.

The four friends knew that Jesus is one who can and will heal, and Jesus recognized their faith. There is little danger that these men more than a mere miracle worker - this is obviously faith based on knowledge, faith that will not be discouraged by obstacles blocking the way, even by crowds of religious people.. This is the faith that will remove a roof if that is the only way to Jesus. This is the faith that Jesus sees and answers:--not blind superstition,

but a sober, informed faith.

Instead of simply healing the paralytic, Jesus declared that his sins were forgiven! Jesus saw that this was the man's greatest need. Without that forgiveness, physical healing would have been a mockery, for it is very likely that the man's physical disability was the result of a perhaps subconscious guilty conscience. With forgiveness, healing of the body could go ahead.

And so it is today. We are much more aware these days that the state of the mind affects the state of the body, although we are not very likely to see such a dramatic cure as that effected by Jesus. In our Prayer Book, in the section "Ministry to the Sick" and more urgently in the section "Ministry to the Dying", a form of Confession and Absolution is provided for this very reason. Unfortunately, these sections are only printed in the full volume not in the shorter green book. It is a pity that many Anglicans regard private confession with some

suspicion, having been brought up with the mistrust caused by misuse of this Sacrament in some parts of the Church in the past. Because of this bigotry and misunderstanding, a priest is often very hesitant to ask a sick person whether he wants to make his confession. Many people would be affronted - their sins are not that bad! - and some would assume that they must only have a short time left to live.

Unfortunately these and not in the shorter, regard private Confession

Yet it is well known that anxiety, stress, guilt, and fear cause illness, and hinder recovery. Mind you, a Christian ought not suffer from anxiety, stress, guilt, or fear at all, or at most only briefly, for the time it takes to turn it over to God. And we are usually a bit slow in doing this. If we are faithful: resolutely, determinedly, informedly faithful, we know we can take our sickness to Christ whether it be physical, mental, psychological, or spiritual, and He will lift its burden from us. We might not be immediately healed in physical terms, but certainly the weight of it will be lifted and we will be more able to bear it. Jesus Himself had to bear the physical suffering and the sense of spiritual desolation of His crucifixion.

Even He prayed that it might not have to be: "May this cup be taken from me." (Matt:26:39) But no, He had to go through the whole agony and excruciating experience. Ultimately He emerged from it triumphantly, as we know and rejoice about.

An old hymn says it very simply:

"What a friend we have in Jesus

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit;

O what needless pain we bear:

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer!"

How tragic if the friends of the paralyzed man had seen the crowd, given up in despair, and carried him home. Yet that is what many people would have done. That is what we often do ourselves in the face of our own sickness, physical, mental, psychological, or spiritual. In living the Christian life we need the spirit of those four stretcher-bearers of Capernaum, and the same determined, undaunted faith and trust in Christ that they had.

AMEN

"Jesus saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me', Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him." (Mark 2:14)

Who is this Levi? He is not listed among the Apostles, nor is there a Saint Levi in the Calendar of Saints. There is a Levi in the Old Testament, one of the sons of Jacob whose descendants became known as the Levites who held particular responsibilities with regard to the worship of the day - but that was long before. Yet both Mark and Luke have recorded in their Gospels this account of the calling of Levi and his subsequent celebratory dinner. A parallel version of the incident in St. Matthew's Gospel uses the name "Matthew", and it is clear that Levi was Matthew. Probably he changed his name to mark his conversion - in some parts of the Church today people take or are given an extra name for the same reason. I felt I had to clear that point up because you might have wondered why this sermon is about Matthew when the Gospel passage is about Levi. Same chap.

Levi, or Matthew, is a most suitable example for us to consider as members of a basically self-concerned and affluent society. Not because he was so religious that Jesus called him to be one of the Twelve - there is no suggestion of that, rather the reverse. Nor because he is considered to be responsible for the Gospel which bears his name. But because he was prepared to set aside all that he had previously valued to follow Jesus.

The Collect for St. Matthew's Day, September 21st, prays that God will "free us from all greed and love of riches so that we may follow the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ in the way of self-giving love." The older version of the prayer laid it on more strongly, praying for grace to "forsake all covetous desires and the inordinate love of riches." Inordinate means excessive, immoderate, intemperate. So when we use this prayer we are asking that we might have a right view of money, not making it the consuming, all-absorbing passion of our life. Because Matthew, before he answered the call of Jesus did have an inordinate love of riches.

And that is the right starting place as we look at this man and see the example he sets for us. The surest way for a man to make money in that era was to become a tax collector in the service of the Roman Empire. The Authorised Version of the Bible uses the term "publican", which has meant that hotel licensees have come under an undeserved cloud. But the word has changed its meaning in ordinary English usage. Originally it meant a public servant and especially one who handled public money, a tax collector. Of all people, the Jews were the most vigorous haters of tax gatherers. Most people don't like paying taxation, but for a strict Jew, God was the only one to whom it was right to pay tribute money. To pay it to anyone else was to infringe the prerogative to God. Murderers, thieves, and tax collectors A tax collector was debarred from being either law suits. He was even debarred from worship, which is why the tax collector in Luke 18 stood at a distance and would not even look up to heaven. In that story Jesus contrasted him favourably with a Pharisee who made a great show of his religiosity.

Few of us would go that far in our relationship with employees of the Taxation Department, but to understand the conversion of Matthew it is necessary to see him first in his mean and grasping condition. Money was his idol. He had resolved to get rich as quickly as possible - it was the only reason for being in that business - even if it meant fleecing his own people, being ostracised by society, and excommunicated from the Church. He was probably already a wealthy man, dreaming of becoming wealthier still, and eventually retiring to enjoy his old age in peace and plenty.

Then along came Jesus and changed it all. Jesus was preaching at Capernaum, possibly across the road from where Matthew had his customs office. Jesus frequently visited Capernaum on the shores of Galilee, and probably Matthew had heard Him on many occasions, and had no doubt heard of His reputation as a teacher. The more he heard, the more he came to see himself as he was and the narrow, mean and worthless life he was leading. At the same time, he began to glimpse something of the new life Jesus offered under the Kingship of God. One day after He had finished preaching, Jesus stepped across the street to Matthew's office, looked him in the eye and said 'Follow Me!' And Levi the tax collector got up and followed Him. The man who had been filled with greed and selfish love of money - covetous desires and the inordinate love of riches - was set free. He found a new love and new love drove out the old. That new love was supremely the love Jesus had for him. At the same time he made another discovery: in abandoning his money-making, he had suddenly become rich! He had found a new sort of riches - what St. Paul called "the unsearchable riches of Christ". (Eph.3:8) Like St. Augustine he could say: "I gave up all for Christ, and what did I find? I found all in Christ."

The first thing Matthew did was to hold a feast in his house, and he asked the only friends he had, his fellow tax collectors and other outcasts from society, to come and meet Jesus. The scribes and the Pharisees - the "holy" people - were shocked that Jesus should eat with such a company. When He heard it, Jesus replied: "Those who are well have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick do." Jesus had chosen a man whom all men hated, a man who was supposed to be lost to shame and dishonour, and had made him one of His own. A more unlikely candidate to be an apostle it would be hard to imagine, but Jesus saw the apostle buried in the tax collector of Capernaum.

When Luke in his Gospel recorded the conversion of Matthew, he said that he "got up, left everything, and followed him". (5:28) But in fact there was something he took with him; his pen. We open our New Testament and are at once confronted with "The Gospel according to Matthew". Scholarship unanimously agrees that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew primarily for Jewish Christians. Whether in fact he wrote the Gospel as it stands is in some doubt, because great sections of it are transcripts almost identical with St. Mark's Gospel. It is most likely that Matthew collected and edited and issued the first collection of "The Sayings of Jesus". The Gospel which bears his name contains more of the teaching of Jesus than any of the others; -for example, the Sermon on the Mount. So we can take it that Matthew's collection of the Sayings of Jesus, and his account of the teachings of Jesus, formed the basis of the Gospel according to Matthew.

That the Gospel was written with Jewish Christians in mind is borne out by for instance the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 1 which begins with Abraham - to whom the promise was given that his descendants would be the Chosen People of God, and our Lord's earthly line is traced through David. The portrait of Jesus as the Messianic King, looked for down the ages by the Jews, is repeated over and over again: the Magi offer Him gifts for a king, and Herod fears a rival for his throne. "The Kingdom" is mentioned frequently. The fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies is stressed, as is our Lord's attitude to the Law of Moses.

Perhaps that is academic stuff of interest mainly to Biblical students. The main thing is that Matthew placed his talents at the service of his Lord, where once he had used them entirely for his own self-gratification. This man whom all men once despised, became the first to present to the world an account of the teaching of Jesus.

At his conversion Levi became Matthew, a new man totally dedicated to the service of Christ. It was not like a piece of new material used to patch up an old garment, which could pull away after a while. Nor was it like new wine poured into old containers, which could easily split and cause waste. He was a new

creation. As St. Paul wrote: "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." (2 Cor.5:17) It is never too late for us to experience a new conversion, a new way of looking at Christ, a new sense of dedication.

"May He who called Matthew from the selfish pursuit of gain to become an apostle and evangelist free us from all greed and love of riches so that we may follow the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ in the way of self-giving love."

**AMEN**

## **THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD    alternative 26<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

### **Responsibility: Canon Barlow**

"As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of man should have risen from the dead."      Mark 9:9

Again today we are faced with our Lord's preoccupation, it seems, with secrecy. Peter and James and John are explicitly told not to reveal the vision which they had just experienced.

It seems so strange. Surely if Jesus wanted to convince His followers of His identity, His divinity, this was an ideal opportunity. Why the silence with regard to the glory of the incarnate Son of God? Surely if Jesus wanted to draw people into the Kingdom of God, the proclamation first of His healing power, His authority over life and death, and now this recognition by Moses and Elijah, would have followers flocking to Him!

But no. As with many of the healing miracles, so now after the Transfiguration : "Tell no man." Some of the answer at least, lies in the record of the temptations faced by Jesus earlier, in the wilderness, before He even began His ministry. "Turn stones into bread." "Cast yourself from the pinnacle of the Temple." Use the wrong means for the right ends. They were all rejected, firmly. Enticement; buying popularity; coercion - are not the ways Jesus wins people to the Kingdom.

If the Transfiguration had been disclosed before the passion, death, and resurrection, it would have led to the wrong kind of understanding of the Christ - the glory would be there, but not the cross, not the expression and exhibition of the absolute forgiving love of God for sinful man,

Divine power was certainly manifested in the miracles of Jesus. Divine love and understanding were manifested in His teaching and in His dealing with sinners. But for many of His would-be followers that was not enough. No doubt it would have been very different if Jesus had been transfigured before a large crowd, or if He always waited for the crowd to arrive before performing a healing miracle. Plenty of personal glory - but no cross with all that stands for. The people would have accepted Jesus as Messiah, but it would have been the superficial, popular acclaim of a hero and a wonder-worker. And the temptation to be that sort of Messiah had already been overcome.

The true understanding of the Messiahship of Jesus lies in His own words: "He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31)

So the full glory of Christ in healing and in the Transfiguration cannot be disclosed until after the Resurrection. Otherwise the full glory of the love of God would not be able to be demonstrated in the Cross and Resurrection. For the Cross is much more than an historical event which took place about 33 AD. The Cross is certainly not the act of a perfect man giving himself to appease a vengeful, wrathful God who would only accept such payment in lieu of the wholesale damnation of the race of sinful human beings.

It is the act in which the Father Almighty gives up the Son for the benefit of repentant sinners. Furthermore it is an act of the Father to which the Son freely assents. Jesus is not merely the personification of God's power on earth - He is the suffering Son of God, who comes to glory only after His passion, crucifixion and death. It was only when the disciples had faced the cross with Jesus that they could proclaim His earthly life as the manifestation of the glory of God to the world. It is only as we come to fully appreciate all that the Cross implies and stands for, that we can recognise that there lies our salvation, and proclaim the glory of God. Many years earlier Abraham was promised by God that he would be the progenitor of a great nation. He said: "I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and

your descendants after you ....., to be God to you and to your descendants after you." (Gen.17:5,7) And now he was called on to offer his son, through whom the promise was to be extended, as a sacrifice to the same God who had offered the covenant. When Abraham had demonstrated his willingness to obey even this distressing requirement of sacrificing his only son, God took the pressure off,

and substituted a different sacrificial offering. BUT, as St. Paul wrote: "God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all". (Romans 8:32) What God would not require of Abraham, He was to do Himself, and Jesus became the Lamb of God.

"So then", Paul goes on, "who is going to condemn us?" Surely not the Christ, Jesus! Jesus, who died, who was raised from the dead; who is at the right hand of God; who intercedes with the Father for us!

The message of the Transfiguration is deeper than simply showing that Jesus really is the Son of God, despite the outward appearance of His humanity, as if His divine Sonship was somehow hidden away beneath His human nature. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place the account of the Transfiguration immediately after the recognition by the disciples of Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus' subsequent explanation of His Messiahship in terms of suffering, death, and resurrection. Having announced His own coming suffering, Jesus went on to teach that His disciples must also be ready to take up their cross, and follow Him. The true disciple must be at one with his Master. So the disciple, and the Church, comprised of disciples, must also be transfigured - looking beyond suffering and pain and death - to live the life of the risen Christ here and now. A life of selfless love for others, regardless of personal cost. Only in this way will the disciple and the Church become transfigured, with the glory of the Risen Lord shining through them. The Transfiguration is not just the historical record of an incident observed by Peter and James and John. It is an on-going experience for ourselves and for the Church as we seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ; seeking to be fashioned after the image of Christ.

**AMEN**