

Sermon Archive 572

Sunday 15 February, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Transfiguration

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



A Reflection: A forensic investigation

The forensic scientist looks at me, and tries to work out what happened. She looks at my expression. She looks at my posture, whether I'm standing tall, whether I appear to have fallen. She looks at the space around me, for things that may have been props in my story. Is there a trophy, a weapon, a wound? "Forensic" comes from the Latin "forensis", which means "public" - so it's looking for what is public, what can be publicly observed. And from what can be observed, she comes up with theories, and plays them against one another for which is most likely. She compares the strongest candidate with other stories from other times. Has this ever happened before? Is there precedence? Does it seem likely? Is it even possible? She looks at me, and does her best to work out what happened.

There is another approach. I could tell her what happened. You see, I know what happened, because I was there. It happened to me. My telling of what happened will of course be told from my perspective - with all my blind spots and biases. Some will say I'm too close to what happened to speak it objectively. But what is human experience if not human? What is experience if not experience. Critical distance is something we cultivate in our sciences - but that's different from telling our story. We tell the story from within. You can only know me if I open myself to you. If I keep my heart hidden, you won't know me. There have to be moments of revealing. It is conversation, rather than investigation. Let me show you who I am.

-ooOoo-

After the lecture, the student of theology has a question for the Professor. "You say, Professor Torrance", he says "that God is not just

good, but infinitely good. You say that God is not just powerful, but infinitely powerful. But if we take infinity seriously, then infinitely good is nothing like what we mean by good. If we take infinity seriously, then infinitely powerful is nothing like what we mean by powerful. If the difference is infinite, then the difference is absolute - and we can't really say anything about God at all. All we can do is gesture vaguely in some kind of direction."

The Professor says "perfect! You understand the problem perfectly!" The student is not pleased. No light is shining . . . until a wee bit later, he realises. We speak of God not because we have done a forensic examination. We speak of God, because God has said "Here I am. This is who I am".

What did we say before? You can only know me if I open myself to you. If I keep my heart hidden, you won't know me. Let me show you who I am.

The theology student thought he was studying an object called "God". He was learning how to be more clever with a subject, more skilful in applying doctrines. He was building theological muscle in himself. But actually no. He was learning to listen. Learning to hear God saying "here I am. This is who I am". The heart cannot be stormed. The heart must reveal itself.

Hymn: Immortal love

The First Lesson: Matthew 17: 1-9

A Reflection: Six days before

Six days before, Jesus had asked his disciples "who do the people say I am?" And they'd told him what the world was saying. - various theories and rumours. Then Jesus' quick turning of the tables: but who do **YOU** say I am. As Peter had answered "you are the Messiah", it seemed to be a good day for human insight, although Jesus characterised it differently - a day of heaven revealing truth to flesh and blood. And then, inadvertently confirming that it's not about the cleverness of flesh and blood, Peter tells Jesus that Messiahs should not suffer or die, must not suffer and die. Calling Peter "Satan", Jesus makes it clear that today his heart has not been perceived - not at all.

So, I guess it's likely that Peter, James and John (six days later) are not expecting this particular day to bring any deep insight (they know they're not good at insight) - although they **are** going up a mountain. And you know the tropes about God and mountains, and places of prayer and presence. Maybe they were expecting something like a retreat. Just sit with me a while and pray. To that extent, but **only** to that extent, perhaps they were primed for something new.

They see Jesus that day as they have never seen him before. They see him with a clarity, such that they know who he is. They know how he fits with Moses, the giver of the Law. They know how he fits with Elijah, God's prophet with a heart for justice and the people. It fits altogether like a bright shining light. It is as if a voice is saying "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Peter's not one for listening though - not yet. He feels the moment calls him to build something. Build a campsite with tents and locations. Erect some structures into which it all might fit. Quick, we need to do something!

Hush, Peter! Don't erect stuff, don't busy it up. Just listen. Remember the heart cannot be stormed; it must reveal itself. And when it **does**, listen. As the heart speaks, as God says "this is who I am", it is yours to listen. Just listen.

Hymn: Be still

The Second Lesson: 2 Peter 1: 16-19

A Reflection: A lamp shining in the darkness

Sometime later again, a letter is found. It bears the name of Peter; and it's presenting an older man, thinking back to a moment in his life when he saw Christ with a clarity as if from heaven. He remembers a learning moment on a mountain - when he first heard heaven's heart being expressed.

"We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven", he says, "while we were with him on the holy mountain".

So now they no longer believe it's their task to devise clever myths, or theories. The dogma, the doctrine, the forensic examination. It is their task, their spiritual task, simply to remember the showing forth of God's heart. God saying "this is who he is; listen to him".

And so the writer calling himself "Peter" calls upon all who would read his letter to **think** on this - to be attentive to it as a lamp shining in a dark place - until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. We listen. We attend - with a gentled spirit, we attend. We see the light. The morning rises in our hearts. How good, Lord, to be here.

Hymn: Blessed Jesus

A Conclusion: Parts of the picture

Moses, the Law giver, was part of the picture - and there have been many times throughout history, when the church's understanding of Law has been important. We have needed to articulate, for the sake of the world, that particular shape of life where "thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, though shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour". It has been important for the church to articulate these visions for life. Elijah also was part of the picture. There have been many times when we have needed to express the fiery rage and passion of the prophets. When masked thugs drag people through the snow for committing the crime of having brown skin. When people are shot in the head, or shot in the back and authorities don't bother investigating. When missiles continue to fall on Ukrainian neighbourhoods, and Stevie Wonde says "when you know something is wrong, you **have** to do something". The Law and the prophets are part of the picture of our calling.

Central to the picture, though, of our understanding God, is Peter learning to be still. Central to the picture is light. Central to the picture is Christ's face shining like the sun. Central to the picture is attending to remembering when the heart was revealed. How good, indeed, to be here.

A moment of quiet.

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