



“Wow!”

A service of reflection for Sunday 14th February

Introduction: The Bible story for Sunday 14th February is about the mountain top experience of Jesus being confirmed as God’s special son. It was what we would call a “wow” moment for the disciples who were there with Jesus. This might lead us to ask when might we have had a glimpse of God’s glory and what the effect of that is on our lives.



The photo is of Beamsley Beacon taken from the Tarn on Ilkley, Moor, January 2021 by Jon Topham

Our first song starts with the kind of moments that most of us are probably more familiar with, that is appreciating the beauty of the earth and all the people who have loved us or helped us.

Hymn For the beauty of the earth *Singing the Faith* 102

Please find here a contemporary version of this hymn as sung by Matt Beckingham and using beautiful photographs:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a8v2MqO7yg&list=PLAs_mtl6dnlvkrpRbnWHdMAHaGdMSj6LkS&index=24

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| <p>1 For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies :
<i>Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.</i></p> <p>2 For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light :</p> <p>3 For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,</p> | <p>for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight :</p> <p>4 For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled :</p> <p>5 For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven :</p> <p>Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835–1917)</p> |
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Prayer

Almighty God, we ask you to show us something more of who you are and how awesome your presence is. Overcome our fear of the unknown, and lead us into a new experience of you. May our worship today be as on a mountain-top, a transforming encounter that empowers our discipleship. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Mark 9: 2-9

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so

frightened.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Good News Bible © 1994, 2004 published by the Bible Societies/HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., UK Good News Bible © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992. Used with permission.

Introduction to the next song: In this Bible account for Peter the experience was so good that he wanted to stay there on the mountain. He wanted it to go on. We are going to sing now a song that celebrates something of what the disciples saw and speaks of how we want to sing of it all our days.

Song My Jesus, my Saviour *Singing the Faith* 363

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhADB - GCHY&list=PLAs_mtL6dnvkrpRbnWHdMAHaGdMSj6LkS&index=15](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhADB-GCHY&list=PLAs_mtL6dnvkrpRbnWHdMAHaGdMSj6LkS&index=15)

Sermon "Wow"

Recently when I was out walking at dusk the sky over Beamsley Beacon had turned pink and was somehow reflected on the snowy slopes. It was a real "wow" moment! We might define a "wow" moment as a surprising experience of beauty that makes us stop in our tracks.

I wonder when you last went "wow"? You may well be able to recall seeing an unusual bird like a gold finch with its flash of yellow and red or even seeing a robin can quite lift a day. Or maybe it has been something you have seen or shared in on a holiday? Eighteen months ago we were fortunate enough to visit the Italian mountain town of Luca. It has narrow medieval streets and turning the corner from one into a square I looked up and saw an immense mosaic of Jesus on the front of a church. That was a real "wow" moment. It was beautiful and awesome and made my spirit soar!



Myrabella / Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=26739308>

You might well be wondering when again you will have a surprising experience of beauty. Given the restrictions of the current time our options for change and surprise are very limited. Many of us are wondering when we might be able to go away on holiday or even have a day trip or get out of our homes to a café or church event. What is it, I wonder, that we are really seeking when do we long for a holiday or a trip out?

Well I suppose we all get a little tired of repetition and in the modern phrase "the same old, same old". When we go somewhere different and see something new it can be very stimulating and refreshing. It can help us enjoy life and also sustain life. Sometimes such a change can even be life-transforming. That was certainly the case for the disciples around Jesus, who according to today's passage, accompanied him up the mountain.

In the story from Mark's gospel we are given a picture of a fantastic "wow" moment. This "wow" event had a transforming effect upon the disciples and upon followers of Jesus reading about it down through the years. According to Mark's account of the life of Jesus, just before this event on the mountain, Jesus has explained to his disciples that he must suffer and die. He has also said that those who would come after him must also take up their cross. Since the cross was associated with criminality, torture, death and disgrace we can imagine that it will have been hard for the disciples to comprehend that it was part of Jesus' mission. So the events on the mountain when Jesus was affirmed as God's chosen and special son, coming so soon after this talk of the cross, will have given a welcome lift. We can understand that it would have helped Peter, James and John mightily in their understanding of what Jesus was about. It would have boosted their confidence and the confidence of all those followers of Jesus reading it ever since. It was even given a special name – the transfiguration.

The events described in today's passage are a confirmation of Jesus' holy nature. They indicate in language well known to Jewish people that God was at work. In fact, they would have really understood from this story that God was present in power and splendour.

In the gospel account the appearance of Elijah and Moses, the great spiritual heroes of Jewish faith, was very exciting for Peter. He is so moved that he wants to stay right there on the mountain top and suggests building shelters for everyone. However, the special "wow" moment is not permanent. Very soon, Jesus leads them down the mountain and back to work. If we read on to the next verses in Mark's account in chapter 9 we learn that next Jesus heals a very sick boy. This was the kind of work that the disciples of Jesus who were transformed by the experience of his death and resurrection were to go on to share in themselves.

We might wonder what our "wow" moments today have to do with the "wow" of the transfiguration. And what do our longed-for-holidays or outings have to do with God? Well interestingly the word holiday comes from the old English words "holy" and "day". The original holidays were days to celebrate special Christian festivals. The original purpose of a holiday was to pay attention to God. And that is something we can do whether we are at home or at church or on the "Costa del fun"! In our Bible story Jesus takes a few of the disciples up a high mountain where they were alone. This reminds us that is good to take time to focus on the things of God. In fact it is essential to sustain life and action.

When we do, like those first disciples, we can experience something more of the power and beauty of God. It may not last long, soon we will have to go back to ordinary business, but we will be empowered by the experience.

The time will come when we can go out of our homes and go on holiday again. A time will come when we might perhaps have more opportunity for spectacular "wow" moments. But whether we are at home or away, what will we look for? Will we just be looking for a change and entertainment? Or might we look for a deeper "wow"?

My holiday "wow" moment at the mosaic on the Italian church deepened when I learnt that it was created to remember the faith of Saint Fridianus. He was an Irish monk, much given to the solitary life of prayer, who lived in the mountains between Pisa and Lucca in the sixth century. He is renowned for helping the residents of Luca in lots of ways including with floods from their river and rebuilding their city.

Might we today look for a "wow" in seeing God powerfully at work in people around us. Might we have a "wow" at seeing how God is able to change things for the better? Might we let that transform us? And will we share that delight by coming down the mountain and helping others in need?

Lent is nearly upon us. Might there be some steps we could all take each day to pay attention to God and so be rewarded by the uplift of a "wow" revelation? Jesus used to go up mountains and pray. What will help you and me to sustain a life of love in action?

Prayer of praise

God of divine power, what a spine-tingling, hair-raising picture we have of the disciples on the mountain with Jesus! One minute they were looking upon Jesus, the man. Next, they were tuned into your glory shining in and through him. **God of life-changing moments, we glorify you.**

Your same radiant light, available to us through relationship with Jesus your Son, transforms our hearts. **God of life-changing moments, we glorify you.**

Your divine Holy Spirit tunes our faith in unexpected ways through the transforming radiance of your love. **God of life-changing moments, we glorify you. Amen.**

Prayer of confession

Lord, whereas it's part of our faith walk to seek and be open to life-changing moments,

forgive us when we just plod through life and get despondent with the mundane.

We are sorry, Lord.

Shine on us, we pray.

On the other hand, we can at times get fixated on the spiritual mountain-tops and so miss out on what's happening below in the everyday.

When things are going well for us, we can get wrapped up in the moment and be forgetful of others.

We're sorry, Lord.

Shine on us, we pray.

There are many voices tuned into today's world telling us how to live and what's best.

But you, Lord, are our authority in life.

Forgive us when we fail to test things against your word.

We're sorry, Lord.

Shine on us, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Jesus' divine nature was confirmed on the mountain – he is God's beloved Son.

He went on to suffer; he died and rose again for us, conquering sin and death.

Now he sits at God's right hand, glorified in heaven – and thanks to him, we are completely forgiven. **Amen.**

Prayers for others: Perhaps today you might pray first for those you know who feel very trapped in repetitive circumstances; then pray for those who are longing for a trip to a café or a church or a holiday or time off; then for those who are ill and are waiting for someone to help; and finally for those who work in places that are closed at the moment or have uncertain futures. Please pray that we can all see God at work with power and find a balance in our lives between rest, prayer and action. Following the path of Jesus. **Amen.**

The Lord's prayer

Hymn Lord of creation, to you be all praise *Singing the Faith* 449 (The tune is *Slane* ie Be thou my Vision). Find it here with photographs again:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3jh7sEFHvo>

1 Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous
your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
and yet in the heart of the humble you
dwell.

2 Lord of all power, I give you my will,
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is
song;
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is
strong.

3 Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,

rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to
find; what eye has not seen and what ear
has not heard
is taught by your Spirit and shines from
your word.

4 Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
your love to inspire me, your counsel to
guide, your presence to shield me,
whatever betide.

5 Lord of all being, I give you my all;
if I should disown you, I stumble and fall;
but, led in your service your word to obey,

I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow (1882–1974)

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, now and for evermore. Amen.

Lent starts on Ash Wednesday 17th February. Let's prepare to examine our lives in the light of Christ's call to follow him.

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