

## March 2020

*This is an edited version of a sermon at the 8 a.m. Eucharist on the Sunday before Lent*

The Gospel for the Sunday before Lent is the wonderful story of how Jesus appeared to his disciples on the mountain with Jesus - the Transfiguration: a glimpse of glory before the painful journey towards Holy Week and Easter. The Transfiguration always makes me think of a passage from *The Wind in the Willows*. It's from the chapter called "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn."

Rat and Mole were paddling along the river, just for fun, when Rat suddenly heard something that sounded like music. No sooner had he pricked his ears up to listen more closely it disappeared. *"It's gone!"* he sighed, *"So beautiful and strange and new. Since it was to end so soon, I almost wish I had never heard it. For it has roused a longing in me that is pain, and nothing seems worthwhile but just to hear that sound once more and go on listening to it for ever."*

For Rat entranced by music on the river, read Peter overwhelmed by the sight of Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration. He did not know what to do with himself. We all have moments of utter confusion. Some experiences are so mind-blowing, there are not words to describe them and we may be in danger of making a fool of ourselves. In Peter's case, before his very eyes the face of Jesus had changed and his clothes had become dazzling white; then suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared in glory, talking with Jesus about his coming suffering and death in Jerusalem.

Not surprising if he was little confused! All he could think of doing was putting up three temporary shelters. It wasn't perhaps the most intelligent of suggestions, but it was as I say, all pretty understandable! He thought, it seems, that he could kind of capture this moment - make it last for ever.

But of course he completely misunderstood what was going on. The experience itself was overwhelming enough - just read the story again! But when all this glory was mixed up with predictions of suffering and death, it was just too much for human brains to cope with.

At this point we part company with Rat, for his experience was of sheer wonder. For Peter, the revelation was wonderful to be sure, but it was also to give him strength and hope for the awfulness of what lay ahead for Jesus and ultimately for himself too.

The main thing is that we are all caught up in a mystery - a vision of heaven even while we are still on earth. Don't try to get it all buttoned up in your mind. Cherish the glimpses God has given you of his glory, however fleeting and confusing they may have been; cherish them but do not try to hang on to them. Use them rather as a resource to help you face the hard and even the simply boring times in life.

So back now to Rat and Mole, sculling down the river. The music that so entranced Rat came and went, but eventually they came to its source, Mole had been a healthy sceptic, but suddenly he *"felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror - indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy - but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near."*

*"Rat!" he found breath to whisper, shaking. "Are you afraid?"*

*"Afraid?" murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. "Afraid! Of Him. O never! never! And yet - and yet - O, Mole, I am afraid!"*

*Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.*