

Sermon: "Jesus' Transfigured"  
Richard Dalton

**We all need encouragement. We need it when we're young; we need it when we're old and we need it in the years between. It might seem strange but even those who are doing well in life need encouragement. It's clear that those who are struggling need encouragement.**

**While we recognise the importance of encouragement and really like it when someone encourages us, encouragement is one of those things that we don't do enough.**

**Eric Moussambani of Equatorial Guinea was an unlikely hero of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The 22-year-old African had only learned to swim a few months before the Olympics, had only practiced in a 20 metre pool without lane markers, and had never raced more than 50 metres. The International Olympic Committee has a program that encouraged swimmer from poorer nations to participate even though they didn't qualify. He entered the 100 metre men's freestyle.**

**There were two other swimmers but they were disqualified because of false starts; Moussambani was forced to swim alone. He never put his head under the water's surface and flailed wildly to stay**

**afloat. With ten metres left to the wall, he virtually came to a stop. Some spectators thought he might drown! The capacity crowd got on their feet and cheered the swimmer on. Finally, the African reached the wall and hung on for dear life.**

**When he had caught his breath and regained his composure, the French-speaking Moussambani said through an interpreter, “I want to send hugs and kisses to the crowd. It was their cheering that kept me going.”**

**Some times we need encouragement in the small things of daily life – it helps us get through the day. Maybe a phone call, a note of appreciation, an act of kindness or people telling us they’re praying for us.**

**There are those big moments in life – when we are unsure or when we’re dog tired, when life is at a crossroad or when we have to make major decisions about our career, our marriage partner, buying a house, applying for a new job, major medical decisions – it in those moments that encouragement means a lot.**

**Now you might well be asking what has all this got to do with the gospel story about Jesus encounter with Elijah and Moses on the mountain and the voice that came from heaven, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!” (9:35). There are lots of angles**

**that we can view this gospel story – Jesus divinity, the disciples wanting this special moment to last forever, the command to listen to Jesus – but today I want to consider this.**

**Jesus was truly a human like you and me and experienced the same joys and fears that we do. God the Father knew that Jesus needed encouragement, just as much as any of us. This is part of what's behind the transfiguration event. Jesus had been busy in the villages and towns – he had healed people, raised the dead, calmed storms, fed thousands of people – and now he was coming to the point where he would soon head for Jerusalem.**

**Just before the reading from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples that it would not be long when he would suffer at the hands of his enemies, and be put to death. He knew what lay ahead of him in the very near future. He knew that in Jerusalem he would face wickedness head on; not just that of the people who lived at the time, but for all people of all time.**

**He was completely innocent but he would die cruelly – whipped, mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross naked while everyone watched as he struggled for breath. Just this thought would make the bravest and strongest heart flinch. Luke tells us that Elijah and Moses spent some time talking with Jesus about**

**God's plan to save humanity and how this would be carried out through his dying in Jerusalem. This whole thing was a huge undertaking and Jesus needed every encouragement to keep his eyes on the goal.**

**We can visualise it like this. God the Father puts his hand on Jesus' shoulder and gently says, 'I support you. I know it's going to be incredibly tough, but this is your calling. You can do it'.**

**But the Transfiguration event wasn't just to encourage Jesus. Seeing Jesus glow with dazzling brightness and hearing Elijah and Moses talk about what was about to happen was also an occasion that encouraged the disciples. They needed to understand who Jesus was and what was about to happen to Jesus. The words of the heavenly voice, *'This is my Son, whom I have chosen—listen to him'* confirmed that Jesus was God's Son, chosen for a special task.**

**I think we can safely say that when everything was turned upside down when Jesus was arrested and then crucified, the disciples were confused and troubled by everything that was taking place. Later when they reflected on Jesus' life and especially the day Moses and Elijah talked with him, what took place in Jerusalem started to make sense. They**

**could see that everything that happened was part of God's amazing plan to save all humanity.**

**It's not easy following God's plan or being a faithful disciple. For any Christian who takes Jesus' word seriously there will be times when staying loyal is a difficult thing.**

**Being obedient and loyal servants of Christ does not come easy. This doesn't come naturally. We need encouragement. God knows this. God knows this so much that one of the gifts of his Holy Spirit is the gift of encouragement. It's there in a list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:8. The word literally means to come alongside of and in partnership with another person to give them a lift. The word Paul uses here has the same origin as that funny sounding name for the Holy Spirit – the Paraclete – the counselor, the encourager, the one who comes alongside of others representing Christ to them. The Holy Spirit does this for us. Now we are called to do this for each other.**

**We are called to do this for the fellow members of the church. In every congregation where people of different backgrounds and differing ideas come together there are those times when put downs, discouragement, unkind criticism and uncaring attitudes toward certain people raise their ugly heads. All of us are guilty of this to some degree or**

**other. When the disciples were travelling with Jesus they often got it wrong and couldn't understand why Jesus would want to touch lepers, have dinner with all kinds of undesirable people, even give up his valuable time for children.**

**On those occasions when the disciples were anything but encouraging, Jesus responded with love and forgiveness, and encouraged the disciples to think through what was happening. He wanted them to be encouragers – people who didn't look down on others but were supportive of even those who didn't seem to be worthy of this kind of treatment. It was often a hard lesson for them to learn but as we read the Book of Acts we see how the love of Christ in their lives won the day. Before meeting Jesus, there were certain kinds of people they avoided. But with Christ's love in their hearts they did everything possible to be without prejudice and so encourage jailers, Romans, Greeks, Ethiopians, Jews, whoever crossed their path to be disciples of Jesus.**

**Just for a moment think about people who have been encouragers to you. Anyone who is a leader of some kind, whether manager of an aged care facility or the principal of a school, the pastor of a congregation or the mayor of the shire, there are times when the load becomes very heavy. I know how much I appreciate the encouragement that people give me. It may be**

**just a simple, “Keep up the good work” but even the simplest encouragement can have a powerful impact in stressful and demanding times.**

**Think about this for a moment – who has been encourager to you? In one way or another they were God’s servants to you, whether they realised it or not, giving you the confidence to keep on doing a good job, helping you deal with moments of doubt about your ability, supporting you and encouraging you when everything seemed to be hopeless. Thank God for those significant people in our lives who have been encouragers.**

**It follows then to ask, “How can we be God’s servants who encourage others? How can we encourage others, get alongside of them and give them a lift”.**

**For some people encouraging comes easy, others have to work at it. For some it’s easier to criticise, use sarcasm, give hidden messages, get angry. When we do this we need to remember that it is so easy to permanently scar another person with harsh words.**

**In the New Testament there are lots of statements that include the words ‘one another’. Statements like love one another, pray for one another, care for one another. Alongside of these is ‘encourage one another’. We may never realise this but years down**

**the track someone will remember with thanks the words or deeds of encouragement that you gave.**

**As we elect leaders for our congregation. It's easy to be critical and judgemental of what they do and the decisions that they are involved in – they aren't perfect and will make mistakes. But I believe that it's the responsibility of every person here to be an encourager and give our leaders whatever support they need. Let's not take them for granted but get alongside them, congratulate them, and support them with words and actions that reflect that we really appreciate the fact that they give up their own time, use their talents and often their own money to serve others. I'm sure none of them look for pats on the back but it does go a long way when someone pays a compliment and gives encouragement. You never know what impact your words will have on that person.**

**At age sixteen, living in Budapest, Andor Földes (1913-1992) was already a skilled pianist (when 8 years old he played a Mozart Piano Concerto with the Philharmonic Orchestra) but his personal life was at an all time low. It so happened that one of the most renowned pianists of the day came to the city to perform. Emil von Sauer was not only famous because of his abilities at the piano, but he was also the last surviving pupil of Franz Liszt.**

**Sauer requested that young Földes play for him. Földes obliged the master with some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann. When he finished, Sauer walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead.**

**“My son,” he said, “when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, ‘Take good care of this kiss – it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.’ I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage.”**

**Can you imagine what an impact this simple gesture of encouragement had on this 16 year old? Encouragement passed on from Beethoven, to Liszt, to Emil von Sauer and now to him. Földes did become a great pianist and Beethoven’s music was closest to him.**

**The heavenly Father encouraged Jesus that day on the mountain top and he encourages us today through the Holy Spirit. Let’s pass on that encouragement to others – at home, at work, where we relax. Let’s pass on that encouragement especially to those who serve us in this church.**

**Let us Pray:**

**Today we pray for the peace of the world, O God, and the peace that only you can give- not only the absence of conflict and battle, but eh also the fullness of life and prosperity for all. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.**