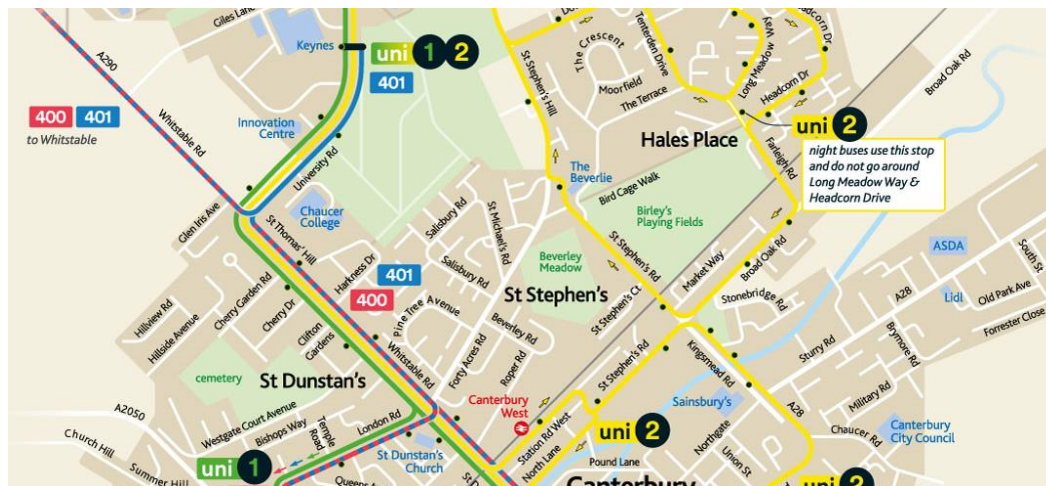


**Sermon Preached at St James King Street, Sydney
Last Sunday after the Epiphany – Transfiguration
2 March 2025 Year C
Dr Murray Harvey**



I have here a map. A map of the University of Kent.

A helpful guide produced for the 650 Bishops and 300 spouses who attended the 2022 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops at the University of Kent. A lovely campus on top of the hill overlooking the city of Canterbury.

I like navigating by a traditional, hard copy, paper map.

Finding my way around a large campus, set out in a circular pattern amidst parks and forests, a map was quite useful.

However, after about a two or three days I still hadn't managed to get my bearings. Unusual for me, especially when armed with a map. I wasn't the only one – the campus was littered with lost bishops and their spouses, wandering aimlessly around in circles, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone, asking each other for directions. Many were seen holding up the map and turning it round and round.

As one person was overheard to say, *just when you think you've got your bearings, it's as if all the buildings move about in the night, and so the next day you get lost all over again.*

On about day 3 or 4 an announcement was made during the housekeeping notices one morning: To avoid getting lost, please use your map. And oh, by the way, for your convenience, only the buildings and pathways that you need to know about are marked on the map. If there's a building that we're not using for the conference – it's not on the map, and if there's a road or path you don't need to go down, it's not indicated on the map either.

I think they had tried to be helpful in tailoring the map to our needs but it wasn't successful.

We stand at an important turning point today – the Last Sunday after the Epiphany – the Feast of the Transfiguration.

From the mountaintop we get a good view of the landscape—we can look back over the season of Epiphany now drawing to a close – the visit of the wise men to the newly born Christchild, indeed back further to the birth of Christ at Christmas; and as we stand on the mountaintop looking forward to Lent which starts this week, we can look ahead through the wilderness, the Passion, Cross and Resurrection.

The church through its calendar has given us a map for this, which hopefully is accurate, it's called a Lectionary of the Church Year.

But of course our spiritual journey, while informed and resourced by the guideposts of the church year and liturgical celebrations, our spiritual journey is a pilgrimage which is different for each of us and a map may or may not be helpful.

We have to approach it with the eyes of faith, and so today's mountaintop experience with Jesus, Peter, James and John is a helpful vantage point.

On the annual pilgrimage which we call Lent which commences on Wednesday, the Bible readings, prayers, music and liturgies will nourish, guide and challenge us – as we walk with Jesus to Jerusalem; to his passion, death and resurrection.

St Francis de Sales said to those about to embark on this journey: *Have patience in all things, but first, have patience with yourself.*

Perhaps he knew that it was the kind of journey where an accurate map might not be possible. He also knew that it was a journey that we don't undertake alone – it is a journey with Jesus – he is our companion and guide.

Lent is a precious opportunity individually and communally to stop and reflect. To look around us at the landscape of our lives and community:

To consider the opportunities and challenges

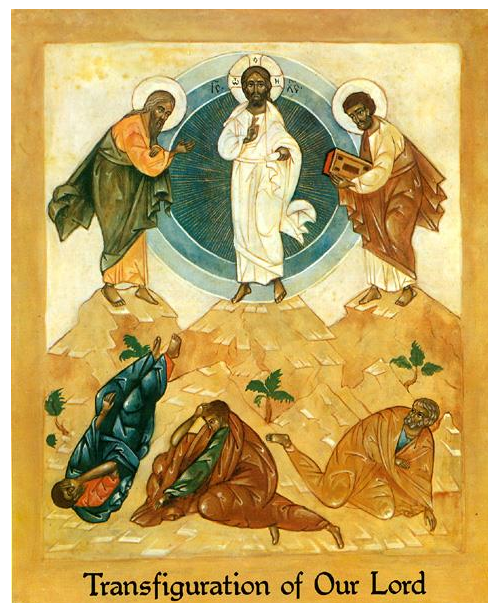
To be confronted by the fact that we haven't arrived – that we are not yet what we are called to be

To open our hearts and lives to God's guidance, growth and transformation

You might say, as I often do at the start of Lent – *well here we go again, we've been here before – Ash Wednesday – Lent Studies – Palm Sunday – Good Friday etc*

But if we're honest the landscape is different every time. Those guideposts (liturgical and other) are the same and offer much wisdom – but I'm a different person than this time last year, as are you, because we've each been changed by the circumstances of our lives:

There's the rapidly deteriorating international landscape which causes us worry and anxiety



Maybe we've lost a loved one since last Lent or have faced some other major life change

Each Lent it's like the University Campus I referred to earlier – it's sort of familiar but it's as if the buildings all move about in the night and we have to get our bearings afresh each new day. In fact the buildings haven't moved at all, it's just that we're looking at them in the light of a new day with different things on our mind.

Given the landscape of our lives right now, given where we are on our personal journey, what is God calling us to at this time?

This is both a personal question and a communal one: as a church community, what is God calling us to now?

I appreciate receiving your magazine – St James Connections – every couple of months – it helps me keep abreast of happenings here. I know that last year was the big organ project. I know you have other ongoing projects and ministries here at St James, an ongoing mission and presence in the centre of the city. What is your discernment of God's call to you in this parish this Lent?

And how does your personal journey and the gifts you have – intersect with the needs of the St James community, the needs of the church right now?

In Luke's version of the Transfiguration we learn that Jesus was praying on the mountain. Luke alone records this (9:29). This vantage point on the mountain can bring clarity of vision for what lies ahead, but only if we use it as an opportunity for prayer. What vantage points, or key turning points are coming up on your journey, and will you use them as opportunities for prayer?

Jesus, Peter, James and John did not stay on the mountaintop for long. Peter felt that they should make three shelters for Jesus and the visitors, the Gospel writer insists that Peter had misunderstood the occasion (9:33). In fact Luke has them quickly back at the bottom of the mountain (9:37) where Jesus heals a young boy.

Over the coming days in the scripture readings for the first part of Lent we will hear about Jesus' time in the wilderness - the season of Lent imitates this time of Jesus in the wilderness – a time of discernment and prayer that served to clarify his purpose and mission.

In a similar way for us Lent can help clarify where we are on our wider, ongoing journey and mission. We can't stand still and build a tent here, we have to navigate onwards – as we're reminded in today's Transfiguration reading.

Our lives can be chaotic and unpredictable – as I said we are each a slightly different person now to the person we were this time last year because of the changing landscape of our lives – for which we don't have an accurate map – where are we on our journey now and what is God calling us to be and to do?

In our discernment, what are the next steps?

Thankfully Jesus is on the journey too – and from the mountaintop of the Transfiguration we get a glimpse of his future glory.

I understand that at Lent you'll be using Malcolm Guite's *Word in the Wilderness* anthology. There you will pick up on the themes of maps and mapping, through poems about life as pilgrimage – about how our outer journey through life (during Lent and at other times) is linked with a deeper, inner journey.

One such poem is entitled *Through the Gate**. I'll finish with part of it:

*... loose the veils
and draw the curtains back, unbar the doors,
of that dread threshold where your spirit fails,*

*The hopeless gate that holds in all the fears
that haunt your shadowed city, fling it wide
and open to the light that finds, and fares*

Through the dark pathways where you run and hide ...

*Open the map to Him and make a start,
And down the dizzy spirals, through the dark,
His light will go before you. Let him chart
and name and heal.*



* <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2024/03/page/2/>

Through the Gate (*full poem*)

Begin the song exactly where you are,
For where you are contains where you have been
And holds the vision of your final sphere.

And do not fear the memory of sin;
There is a light that heals, and, where it falls,
Transfigures and redeems the darkest stain

Into translucent colour. Loose the veils
And draw the curtains back, unbar the doors,
Of that dread threshold where your spirit fails,

The hopeless gate that holds in all the fears
That haunt your shadowed city, fling it wide
And open to the light that finds, and fares

Through the dark pathways where you run and hide,
Through all the alleys of your riddled heart,

As pierced and open as his wounded side.

Open the map to Him and make a start,
And down the dizzy spirals, through the dark,
His light will go before you. Let him chart

And name and heal. Expose the hidden ache
To him, the stinging fires and smoke that blind
Your judgement, carry you away, the mirk

And muted gloom in which you cannot find
The love that you once thought worth dying for.
Call him to all you cannot call to mind.

He comes to harrow Hell and now to your
Well-guarded fortress let his love descend.
The icy ego at your frozen core

Can hear his call at last. Will you respond?