

**May I speak in the name of the Living God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

I would like to begin, by sharing with you a poem
written by Lynn New, a poet and artist from the Isle
of Wight.

The poem is called, "Like a Jigsaw"

**Take a piece of jigsaw
And turn it in your hand.
Place it on an empty board
And try to understand
That the tiny piece of cardboard
That's shaped and holds design
Is like a piece of lifetime
That one cannot quite define.**

**But when you lift another piece
And place it by the other
You'll find they match just perfectly
And soon you will discover
That though it seems at random
Our lives in pieces be
When they are placed side by side
There's perfect symmetry.**

**For life is like a jigsaw
Many pieces there to place:
It could be life you're fitting in
Or just a "piece of face."
But as the jigsaw starts to show
A picture once concealed
When life and puzzle are complete
You'll find life's plan revealed.**

I think that most of us can identify with the thoughts behind this poem. Life really is like a jigsaw. Many different pieces going to make up, not just each day, but also each week, each month and each year of our lives.

Our family, our friends, our colleagues, our work, our leisure interests, our faith – all of these are like pieces of puzzle, which go to make up our lives.

Sometimes, fitting them together is easy, sometimes it is a little more difficult to see the pattern – in fact, sometimes it feels as though there is no way that certain pieces will be made to fit.

This was just as true for the first disciples of Jesus, as it is for us.

As they spent time with Jesus. Getting to know him. Listening to his teaching. Seeing the miracles that he performed. It was as if God was giving them a number of pieces of puzzle, which they had to fit together in order to understand who Jesus was and how their lives fitted into what he was doing.

Over the weeks and months, they had come to recognise that Jesus was no ordinary man. The power of God was clearly working in and through him in a very special way.

Many had tried in different ways to put the pieces together. Some had said that he was Elijah. Some said he was one of the ancient prophets. Others said that he was John the Baptist come back to life.

When Jesus asked his “disciples who do you say that I am?” – it was Simon Peter who declared that Jesus was the Christ.

Even with this understanding, the disciples were still confused. Jesus had begun to tell them, how his calling was to suffer and to die on behalf of the people, and that all who would follow him, must be prepared to take up their cross and follow him.

How could this fit with everything else that they knew about Jesus?

This is where the mountain of Transfiguration comes in. Mark tells us, that Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray. While they were there, at the top of the mountain, something special and dramatic happened.

As he prayed, the appearance of Jesus' face change, and his clothes became as white as lightning.

Jesus is seen to be talking with Moses and Elijah – The other Gospel writers tell us that they were talking about what was to happen to him, as he journeyed towards his arrest, trial and crucifixion in Jerusalem.

This was a symbolic encounter – showing the disciples that in a special way – what was about to happen to Jesus, fitted into the overall picture of God's plan of Salvation.

What was about to happen to Jesus, was a fulfilling of all the Old Testament prophecies, and a culmination of God's leadership of his people through Moses and the other great patriarchs.

The cloud that Mark describes as enveloping them there on the mountain top symbolises the presence of God – and indeed his voice is heard proclaiming that Jesus is his Son, the one he has chosen to bring salvation to his people – if only they will listen to him.

This whole experience enabled the disciples to see Jesus in a new light – to look with a fresh perspective on the things that had been happening, and the things that were about to happen to Jesus.

It was as if the blinding light of recognition, enabled them to fit together some of the more difficult pieces of puzzle, and begin to see the bigger picture.

How does this fit in with the picture of our lives?

I am sure that none of us have difficulty with the pieces of our lives that bring us happiness and joy. Times of celebration and success –birthdays, weddings, baptisms. The things that we enjoy doing – the friendships and relationships that work well – they all fit together without too much difficulty and we can find pattern and meaning in them.

I am sure that all of us also have pieces which we really struggle to place within our lives. Disappointments, failures, times of sadness, illness, times of tragedy

We try desperately to push these kinds of things to the edges of our lives – we can't see how they could possibly have a place in the main part of the picture. We struggle to fit them in at all.

It is precisely at these times, that we need to learn from the experience of the disciples on the mount of the transfiguration.

We can only ever hope to make sense of these parts of our lives by climbing the mountain, and drawing closer to God in prayer.

Even though we may not feel like climbing the mountain – fear, sadness, disappointment, confusion can all feel like huge mountains that we need to negotiate.

We may not find it easy –mountain climbing requires a lot of stamina and perseverance.

But if we allow God to draw us to himself – his presence is there like a cloud at the top of the mountain, which envelopes us in his love in a way that we could not have imagined standing at the foot of the climb.

Just as the experience at the top of the mount of Transfiguration strengthened the disciples, the experience of truly drawing close to God in prayer, can strengthen us, and help us to see ways of fitting even the most difficult pieces of our lives together.

For in these moments of prayer we can sense the Presence of Christ among us in a special way and receive flashes of insight, brief glimpses of Eternity, in which the barrier between the broken and incomplete humanity of NOW and the Godly and complete FUTURE is lifted. In such moments, we see clearly who Christ is and what God's presence means for our lives.

With the fresh insights that prayer can give us, we can gradually come to see that the most difficult and the most challenging pieces to accept and fit together, are sometimes the ones which ultimately enable us to see most clearly the pattern of God's love at work in our lives – to heal, to guide, to transform what would otherwise be hopeless mess.

Although there can be immense pain and hurt caused by a tragic bereavement, the diagnosis of a serious illness, the announcement of a redundancy – if we climb the mountain and draw close to God in prayer, these pieces of our lives can become a focus for God's love and healing.

They can become for us points of fresh insight into the love, care and support of friends and neighbours.

Instead of being pieces that distort or obscure the pattern of our lives– they can become pieces which reveal the true depth of God’s love for us.

Our God is not someone we know just in times of joy and success – he is a God who is right there alongside us in the difficult times of our lives to walk every step of the way with us.

It is no accident that we have the opportunity to reflect on this reading today on this Sunday before the start of Lent.

Lent gives us each an opportunity to climb to the mountain top with Christ and through spending time with him in prayer and reflection discern something more of the light of his love for us and for the world.

In our busy lives, it is easy for the pressures of work and different commitments to obscure the patterns in the picture of our lives that Christ wants us to see; OR for worries, anxieties and fears to make it difficult for us to see how the different parts of our lives fit together and reveal God's presence with us.

Lent offers us the opportunity to build in a little extra time for prayer and for study. We might do this alone, or as part of a group – I do encourage you to join in one of the Lent Groups, which this year are exploring the Prayer of St Francis of Assisi. These moments of prayer, reflection and study, like mountain top experiences, can enable us to see more clearly the pattern of God's love at work in our lives.

Like the disciples, we too, may come to see God's love, which shone so brightly in the face of Christ on the mount of transfiguration, shining through in our lives and the life of the world, in a way that will give us the faith and courage to walk with renewed commitment the way of the Cross. Amen.