

Kayleigh Lucas, 14th February 2021, Bradford Cathedral (2 Cor. 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9)

‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’

May I speak in the name of God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

I wonder if you can remember the first time you looked at the night sky?: The vast expanse of stars stretching for as far as the eye can see.

Can you remember what it looked like to you as a child?

Did it make sense to you?

Did it need to?

How much of it could you see?

I have a niece who is nearly two. She loves the stars and the moon and is filled with such a sense of awe and wonder when she sees them, whether in the sky or projected onto the inside of her tepee or makeshift den. For her, as a child, they don’t need to make sense; they are simply amazing.

I wonder too if you can remember the last time you looked at the night sky. I mean, properly stopped to look at it.

How long did you spend?

What did you see?

Were you looking for specific constellations?

Were you able to find what you were looking for?

I can always find Orion but normally give up after that, even with an app on my phone to help. As adults, we know more about the stars than when we were younger and look at them with knowledge of what they are and the constellations they make. We no longer see them with the fresh awe and wonder that my niece does. Something in us has changed.

In this morning’s Epistle to the Corinthians, we heard Paul talking about those who are perishing, and how for them the gospel is veiled, and God’s glory is hidden from them, unable to be revealed. He reminds those in Corinth that they are proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, to provide light in the darkness to those hidden beneath a veil.

We have been hearing a lot in the news, and on social media, of the struggles many people, perhaps including ourselves, are facing during this third lockdown, where there is seemingly no date for when this might end, where we are tired and exhausted from staring at screens, and not being able to physically see those that we love or do those things that sustain us. How do we, in this challenging time, lift our own veils, to help those around us lift theirs?

In today's Gospel we heard Mark's depiction of the Transfiguration: the moment where Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James and John, go up the mountain before Jesus is transfigured, where Mark describes his clothes becoming a dazzling white. The disciples, at this moment, do not know what to say. They, as on other occasions, are unable to make sense of what is happening right before their eyes. Following this a cloud descends and they hear a voice: "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!".

The disciples are encouraged to listen to what Jesus has to say. But there is more to listening than just hearing. They need to listen and understand what Jesus is saying. Something they are not always very good at doing: something that at times we too are not very good at doing; stopping and finding time to truly listen. Something else always seems to get in the way.

A few years ago I visited the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. There you can go into the planetarium and see a show, either on the Solar System or the Night Sky. These are virtual running throughout the day, so you don't have to wait until the evening to see the stars; a little like my niece and her projector.

I opted for the Night Sky, and as the show starts you are shown the sky as it currently is over Greenwich; you get to see exactly what you would see if you led on your back one evening in the park below. I'll be honest, the dazzling lights of London prevent you from seeing much, even in this small open space, and you start to question whether the show was really worth the money. You are stopped from seeing the awe and wonder of what is above your head, veiled by the dazzling lights of the city below. But then, through the wonder of technology, they turn off all the lights, and remove all the light pollution that the city produces. And, just like that, you are a child, seeing the stars again for the first time; hundreds of billions of them. Because of the veil of light pollution, we are unable to see their full glory; hidden ready to be revealed once more.

As we enter this Lenten season, I wonder what we can do to lift our veils? Hidden behind the tiredness and fed-up-ness of lockdown, to listen to what Jesus has to say to us. So that we in turn can proclaim his gospel and lift the veils of those around us.

Normally at this point in the year we are planning our pancake toppings, perhaps indulging in whatever it is you have chosen to give up for Lent. Typically, I don't give something up, rather I take something up – a discipline or commitment for the weeks ahead. Last year I took up

journaling, using St Ignatius' end of day review as a basis for my thoughts. Spending each evening with God, looking back on the day. Asking myself where I had struggled to hear God, where I had felt most in God's presence, and looking ahead to the next day. It forced me to find time to stop and listen, even if it didn't always make sense.

So maybe this Lent, if the thought of giving something up feels unappealing, maybe you might consider taking something up, something that will give you time to listen to what God is saying to you. It may not make sense right now, as it didn't for the disciples on that mountain top, but on Easter Day, once the glory of the resurrection is revealed to us again, maybe then the veil will be lifted, and the renewed glory of the gospel will reveal itself to you once more.

Amen.