

Mark 9:2-9. (2 Kings 2:1-12 & 2 Cor 4:3-6) St M & AA Audio 14/2/21



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

I have being very privileged to travel to the Holy Land on three occasions, firstly as part of my post ordination training, secondly leading a parish pilgrimage and thirdly as part of my sabbatical. On the second occasion we visited the Church of the Transfiguration on the summit of Mount Tabor.

As we travelled via Cana to our destination our guide informed us that the route to the summit was so steep that the coach was unable to go beyond midway. Therefore we would transfer to awaiting taxis to continue the journey to the summit. This was followed by a word of advice, “due to the nature of the road and the nature of the driving, it’s a good idea to close your eyes and pray!!”

The day itself was overcast and as we approached the base of Mount Tabor the cloud clung to the mountain like an overcoat, overshadowing and sadly obliterating any hope of seeing the summit from below, or more thankfully, the precipitous route we would be taking. It’s amazing how differently we all deal with situations that we find uncomfortable. Those who were nervous, tended to aim for the central seats of the taxis, but

how they dealt with it was quite different. Some went very quiet and avoided eye contact, and others launched into constant aimless chitchat, when even to take a breath seemed surplus to requirements. As we travelled upwards the cloud thickened, but as we turned the penultimate corner, we broke through the cloud and were almost blinded by brilliant sunshine, totally unexpected, veiled from view to all still waiting for transport below.

This for me was one of those moments, a 'God' moment, when you know deep within, you have been given insight and understanding beyond any reading, theorising, or extemporising could ever give. For this experience had been given and lived, it left me feeling not only a sense of awe but with a deep centering that my linguistic abilities are unable to convey. An initial desire to let those below know what was awaiting them above leapt to the fore, but was quickly taken away. That was not for me to do.

I cannot and would not say that my experience gave me a direct insight as to how Peter, James and John, must have felt witnessing the transfiguration, but one thing it did do, was help me in understanding to some extent the difference between Peter's garbled reaction to build dwelling places for Elijah and Moses, and the silence of James and John. There's that sense that if we can accommodate something or someone it allows us to experience and cling to it for longer.

However Peter, James and John via this mountain top experience had joined a select group. A group to who direct revelations have been made, a group who had experienced a moment, unpredicted and unbidden. A group enlightened not for their own sakes, but for the sake of others. The reason I say for the sake of others rather than for themselves is that this experience, unlike previous experiences is no longer about

asserting the identity of Christ but more about confirming their calling. For here was Elijah the great prophet and Moses the lawgiver, talking with a transfigured Jesus.

The word transfigured is important because it places quite clearly the importance of Jesus by making the great Elijah and Moses subservient to Jesus. And then to hear “This is my Son the Beloved; listen to him!” The desire to shout from the mountain top of what they had witnessed must have been immense, yet once more Jesus orders them “to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead”. Can you imagine how hard it must have been to obey and keep silent? A possible echoing of the prophets telling Elisha that his master Elijah was to be taken away from him, and his response “Yes I know; keep silent”.

Just as Elisha was to accompany Elijah on his funeral procession, so too, as the disciples accompanied Jesus’ descent from the mountain to the world below, they began to accompany Jesus on his funeral procession to Calvary. I doubt whether this held any personal significance for them at this time. The fact that just as Elisha received confirmation of his calling at the taking away of Elijah they too were to receive the confirmation of their calling at the taking away of Jesus, through his death, resurrection and rising to glory.

Through our daily lives as Christian individuals and communities, and through prayer we may occasionally receive a mountain top experience, an experience to which we want to cling to, that leaves us in no doubt, of the power, goodness and love of God. However if we are to follow Jesus then we must travel the same path, sometimes overshadowed, sometimes precipitous, and sometimes revelatory. A path that can lead us to mountain tops or back to the plateaux’s and valleys of this world, tainted with suffering and evil, the world He came to

save, and the world in which we are all called to serve. Why there is so much suffering and evil in this world is baffling, and I do not believe our human mind to be capable of fully understanding. I can only place my faith in knowing that God became man and experienced our human condition by suffering and dying, thereby giving it some form of meaning and value expressed by the cross, pointing us towards something greater, beyond ourselves, beyond this life.

It is to this life beyond ourselves that our readings point. Things veiled will be revealed at the time of God's choosing not ours. And by this we can be sure we proclaim Christ and not ourselves, therefore letting the 'light shine out of darkness'. Our own possible mountain top experiences though incomparable still however have similar effects. They spur us on in our journey with God, fuelled by new insights and energy, taking us temporarily beyond our selves, beyond our horizons, challenging us to new possibilities. These moments though precious cannot be clung to, they are given so that we may let them go by giving it to others via our daily lives, lived in faith, trust and hope. For one day as Elisha accompanied Elijah, and the disciples accompanied Jesus, we too will take this walk, where faith hope and love will be put to the test.

Until then we are called as Elisha and the disciples were called to do; to proclaim the word of God, and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and remain faithful to him. Baffling though it may be to our modern world we are to trust that through listening, trusting and obeying, our witness in this world will reveal the love of God to the world. For those who have let God into their lives, and have glimpsed in different ways and at different points in their lives the glory of God, are thankfully never the same. For we have the assurance that as we walk with Jesus along this path, so God walks with us, today and always, for "This is my Son the Beloved, listen to him!" Amen.