

Sunday next before Lent 11 Feb 2024

Sermon. Please let me get it!

Have you ever been in a group of people where someone told a joke and everyone else laughed except you? You don't get it. You miss the point. Or have you ever been in the middle of a discussion where another person makes a persuasive point and everyone else nods their head in agreement -- except you? You don't get it. You missed the point.

In today's Gospel story of the transfiguration of Jesus, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain, evidently to give them a special revelation of who he really is.

Perhaps it was to confirm the confession that Peter had made for the other disciples just a week earlier... "You are the Christ!" Perhaps it was to prepare them for the events of his suffering and death which lay ahead. Whatever the reason, Peter, and possibly James and John seem to miss something. They don't quite get it!

This is a theme that runs throughout Mark's entire Gospel. Jesus would teach or heal or tell parables, but his disciples would not understand the meaning or purpose of them. I find it strangely encouraging to read that that Jesus' Messiahship was not understood by those closest to him. Indeed, the disciples are repeatedly portrayed as thick & blind... so you and I are in good company! In Mark it's the blind man who proclaims the true identity of Jesus, who can see who Jesus is... while his closest followers stumble and fumble around in the dark. As a former colleague of mine once noted, in Mark's Gospel anytime the disciples are afraid, you could just as easily translate it as they're confused.

Back to the top of that mountain. If we are not steeped in Jewish tradition, we really can't understand how dramatic that mountaintop experience was for those three men. Moses and Elijah were two of the great "heroes" of the Jewish faith. It was like having a ring-side seat on heaven. But Peter missed the point. Words come tumbling out of his mouth through fear... misquoting... "Lord, this is really great stuff! This is great. Let's build three tents -- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Jesus was giving them a unique and special revelation for the next part of the journey, but Peter thinks he should make it permanent. He wanted to put up three tents so that he could keep the ringside show going. "We should probably stay here." But he somehow missed the point. Jesus didn't answer Peter's idea. Indeed, as soon as he muttered his words about pitching tents and the disciples tried to contain the moment, it disappeared. Interesting! It reminded me of the Welsh Revival at the beginning of the 20th Century... things stopped, rather than keeping pace, keeping moving in tune with the Spirit. "If we live by the Spirit, we keep in step with the Spirit." (Gal 5:25) Jesus went down the mountain again. Trying to contain and control the things of God didn't/doesn't quite work!

And after the vision Jesus led them down from the mountain and toward the greatest vision of God's glory in the days ahead: a ghastly cross and an empty tomb! There's the true glory of God. But surely not - there must be a mistake somewhere? Glory is supposed to be "glorious." Glory is supposed to be "spectacular" like this mountain top experience. Glory is supposed to be "magnificent." A cross and a tomb are none of these!

2,000 years later we still struggle to get it... to get Jesus, to get the Kingdom. We miss the point of the Cross and passion and sacrifice. We don't get 'Dying in order to live', 'strength in weakness', 'the last shall be first and the first shall be last', 'forgive your enemies' 'what is seen is temporal, what is unseen is eternal.' We try to contain God for ourselves and get him to do what we think is right. We tell God rather than listening to him.

We miss the point. We don't get it.

Th journey of Lent leads us into a time of repentance and lament and self denial; walking with Jesus in the wilderness, journeying to the Cross... what's that all about?

Sometimes we don't so much wonder if we've missed the point, but wonder whether there is even a point. We experience disappointment, or our days seem filled with meaningless activity, or we are faced with crisis upon crisis. We get confused and discouraged and down hearted.

I guess that's why God in his goodness gives us revelation of who he is... the mountain top moments, to have a vision in and beyond the ordinary and everyday, vision and revelation down the mountain and in the darkest valley (where he also is), in suffering and pain, challenge and change.

A revelation and a vision of who he is, in order to deal with today and tomorrow and what lies ahead in our lives and in our world. Revelation and vision to give us vision and purpose in our journey on earth and to our heavenly home. Revelation and vision so we may have the courage to shape the world rather than be shaped by the world.

In a little bit of the spirit of St Peter, whilst we can't stay on the mountains and we have to live in the world where God has placed us, (Jesus did actually take his disciples up the mountain) I think we're allowed to absorb verse 7 of Mark 9. Indeed we need Mark 9:7

"Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'"

Allow the glory of the Lord ... so touching, so real, so aglow, so alive to embrace you and your humanity and set you on fire and to sustain you for the ordinary and the everyday, and reflect his glory day to day.

Listen to HIM...

In love, in hardship, in suffering and in joy, in and on the journey, in sacred spaces in pain and torment. In the ordinary and everyday, listen to him. In the sadness and laughter listen to him. In the funeral and the wedding listen to him. In work, at home and in retirement listen to him. In church and in the world, listen to him.

Realise who is speaking, realise who this Jesus of Nazareth is. The one who was flesh and blood, who knew hunger and tiredness and pain just like us... ... but who is also the Messiah, the Christ, the King of glory.

He is the light in the darkness. The way when there seems to be no way. The life in the face of death. The hope in the midst of despair. He is the challenger and antidote for apathy and indifference, for meaninglessness, for bland and luke warm.

As we are overshadowed and as we listen to him, then for once... for a moment... we may get it... or not!

Listen to him...

Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden.

Follow me.

I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life.

I am the light

I am the gate

I am the good shepherd,

I am the resurrection and the life!

I am the bread of life: those who come to me will never be hungry and those who believe in me will never be thirsty.

I am with you always

I have the words of eternal life.