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14-2-21 Sermon recording for Pott Shrigley

Texts: 2 Kings 2: 1-12, 2 Cor 4: 3-6, Mark 9: 2-9

Just before the first lockdown I travelled down to London Euston on the way to visit friends.

Two boys of about eight and ten sitting on the other side of the compartment suddenly sprang up and shouted ‘Look! There it is!’.

We were just passing Wembley Stadium. They had seen the big arch on TV but never before in real life.

They were amazed, delighted and so excited!

It made me think about how often that still happens as we get older. Do those ‘wow’ moments lose frequency?

Hopefully we’ll never, ever reach the point where we’ve seen it all before.

And I’m sure that when we’re eventually allowed our freedom once again many of those ‘wow’ moments will return.

In the story of the Transfiguration we hear how Jesus invites his three closest friends to go up a high mountain with him. This tells Mark’s hearers immediately that something remarkable is about to happen.

In today’s OT reading we hear about the ‘wow’ moment when a chariot of fire pulled by horses comes to lift Elijah up to heaven. It’s a vivid image of God’s power.

Perhaps you remember that God met Elijah and Moses on a mountain top.

And here they are again, this time both with Jesus.

Their appearance couldn’t come at a more appropriate time.

Jesus has just turned his disciples' thinking upside down. Peter has declared 'You are the Messiah!'

Jesus accepts this but then tells them of his suffering and his brutal death that's to come.

He fiercely rejects Peter's incredulity. The disciples must have found it impossible to grasp this unimaginable future. Totally unexpectedly there is tragedy ahead, but now the glory of Jesus' true being is also revealed to them.

Today's story is told from the disciples' perspective.

They see Jesus changed in ways they can only describe by saying that his clothes become brilliantly white.

They see two of the greatest figures in Israelite history speaking to him as equals.

This 'wow' moment is also terrifying!

Peter stammers words that reveal his yearning for the moment to go on for ever. He must have regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth – yet what words could be adequate to the experience?

On this mountain-top he wants to find the resources to build dwellings so that they can stay together - just as God stayed with his people in the tabernacle in the desert.

It was never going to happen that way – this was a moment of fleeting brilliance.

As I'm sure we know well human beings long to embody their faith in bricks and mortar. The existence of our many churches bears witness to this passion to give concrete expression to our moments of wonder.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves 'How can we balance our glimpses of God's glory with our desire for stability?'

Peter's stumbling words are eclipsed by the voice of God. Cloud comes down on the mountain – Jewish tradition linked cloud and the glory of God (Ex 40: 34) – and God speaks from it.

Doesn't this remind us of another seminal moment – the story of Moses and Mount Sinai?

It's a story both relevant to Jesus' Transfiguration and to Lent, which begins on Wednesday.

It shows what can happen when people draw near to God, actively and intentionally. As Jeremiah says 'When you search for me you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me.'

As Moses came back down from the mountain, unknown to him, the reflected glory of God shone from his face.

The rest of the Israelites saw it and in it recognised the divine authority of the ten commandments which he brought with him.

When God spoke from the cloud at Jesus' baptism his words were addressed to Jesus himself.

In our story today God addresses the disciples.

God's voice gives the disciples the words to make sense of what they've seen. All of this has happened because Jesus really is the Son of God – and they are reassured that they should listen to him.

The disciples did receive mixed messages. Their trust in Jesus received a shock as he explained the future that lay ahead. But now they have seen him in transcendent glory.

As they return to 'real life' at the foot of the mountain Jesus tells them to share this with no one, picking up on Mark's theme of secrecy until the full exposure of Jesus' identity happens at the crucifixion.

Down the mountain Jesus is back to the hurly burly of ministry with a young boy the disciples can't heal.

They see Jesus cast out the spirit and make him well. Through this they must get a clearer sense of the way that his glory embodies God's power at work in him.

As the story of the Church progresses the disciples learn to trust the link between God's glory and God's power.

They discover that they too can change the world for good if they hold fast to their trust in God.

A lesson for us too.

What else are we, like Peter, James and John, to take from this highly dramatic transformational event?

At Jesus' baptism the voice of God said 'LISTEN TO HIM.'

Peter had seen and watched all the things Jesus was doing – his miracles, his acts of healing, his transfiguration.

But what the disciples needed to give more attention to was LISTENING to Jesus.

Both Jesus and Moses went up the mountain to spend time with God. To listen to him, to hear him, to be transformed and CHANGED by him.

What about us?

Do we put aside time to listen to God? What is our prayer life and Bible study like? How do we listen to God in the everyday?

Lent is coming up – how about giving this a little more time then?

In the epistle reading for today Paul explores the image of light as a sign of God's presence. He draws on the story of Moses too whose face shone so brightly after he's spoken to God that he needed to wear a veil.

Paul recognises that, for some, the light of Christ is dimmed by a veil that prevents them seeing his glory. When someone turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

There are times in our lives when this lifting of the veil, this transformation, comes through hardship, discomfort and pain.

As we're all learning at the moment we sometimes have to walk in the dark for a while to then hopefully live in the light.

It's this combination of glory and triumph on the one hand and the need for suffering and sacrifice, as modelled in Jesus' death and resurrection, which we, along with Peter, James and John, need to listen to.

Today's 'wow' story of the transfiguration teaches us that we can't have one without the other. If we are to be steadily renewed and grow into the people God has made each of us to be

we must learn to listen to him and trust in his transformative promises.

AMEN