

Sermon for 10am Sunday 3rd March 2019

Readings:-

Exodus 34:29 – end

Luke 9:28 – 43a

Theme – Transfiguration of Jesus; the healing of the boy.

Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever pleasing in your sight O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer

Amen

Introduction

I don't know about you but I am not a great fan of funfairs! I am a real coward when it comes to things like the Roller Coaster etc...

I remember some time ago taking my young grandson to Blackpool to see the lights. He insisted on visiting the fun fair!

I chose the most innocuous looking ride – the log flume.

All went well initially. We sat in this hollowed out log and went on a ride – however, we soon entered a dark tunnel – couldn't see where we were going and the log twisted and turned alarmingly.

Then the climax! We climbed uphill, turned sharply, then plunged to the ground, bursting out into the fresh air and arriving in a pool of water which splashed all over us!

You may remember a famous photograph of Princess Diana, on the same sort of ride, with her 2 young sons. She is laughing uproariously as the water sprayed all over them.

I can assure you I didn't feel like laughing.

Afterwards, I spent some time in a local café drinking hot chocolate and trying to dry out my jeans. (which felt freezing cold in the September evening)

So that was excitement enough for me for a long time! (That same grandson was 33 on Friday))

I think that, in our Gospel reading, the disciples may have felt a bit like me!

- **When following Jesus they never knew what was going to happen next**
- **Although Jesus tried to explain things to them quite often they were in the dark**
- **When, at last, at the climax of an event, they had a glimmering of understanding They were often on the wrong track!**

No wonder they were terrified when they heard a voice coming out of the cloud! They were completely taken by surprise.

To put our reading into context:-

The disciples were subject to all sorts of experiences when following Jesus. He healed the sick – even those who appeared to be lifeless – not long before before our reading they had witnessed Jesus feeding a hungry crowd of 5000 people with only 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Everyone was satisfied, and there were 12 basketfuls of broken pieces left over! A miracle indeed!

Jesus taught in parables, which were sometimes hard to understand, although he had told the disciples directly that he was 'the Son of man' / 'the Christ of God.' Jesus was preparing them for the events which were to come:- the last Supper; his trial and his crucifixion. The disciples still really didn't understand.

So - how must Peter, John and James have felt when Jesus took them up the mountain to pray?

We are told they were sleepy – which would be only natural given the busy life they were leading.

I would also have expected them to be rather relieved to be going quietly, with Jesus, to a place away from the crowds and the stresses and strains and possibly excitements of daily life, to pray. Maybe that's why sleepiness came over them so readily?

Would they also be able to put some apprehension and fear aside for a time? As they would never be sure what was going to happen next. Jesus did such unexpected things. Maybe they were hoping for a bit of a rest....

It was in this context that the disciples became wide awake and witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus'

'As he was praying the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning'

They were seeing Jesus as he really was – the Son of God. Maybe – as Rev Mike suggested last Sunday evening, it was not so much that Jesus actually changed, but more that the disciples were able to see him more clearly, as he really was, in this quiet place, away from all the pressures of life.

So – another unexpected happening when the disciples woke from sleep to witness this radiant figure before them

Yet – Jesus was not alone – Moses and Elijah were with him. Peter presumably, still suffering from shock and amazement made possibly an ill-considered suggestion:-

'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'

Before Jesus could reply they were all enveloped by cloud and a disembodied voice spoke to them out of the cloud:-

'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'

Another shock to the system!

If Jesus was the Son of God – which the disciples had agreed upon- then it must have been God's voice speaking to them.

When the cloud lifted Jesus was alone again and I think the disciples may have been feeling more than a overawed!

We are reminded, in our first reading from Exodus, that Moses too came down from Mount Sinai, with a radiant face, after speaking with God. So much so, that Moses resorted to putting a veil over his face.

Whatever could it all mean?

Scholars have attributed the appearance of Moses and Elijah, at the transfiguration of Jesus, as representing the law and the prophets.

Jesus would very likely have been praying to the Father about coming events, including his crucifixion, and seeking his Father's approval. The appearance of Moses and Elijah would seem to endorse this. As we hear:

'They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem'

So - the transfiguration wasn't a situation to be seen as a permanent event but rather a 'rubber stamp' on what was to come. It would not have been appropriate to erect 3 tents, as

Peter was suggesting, as it was more of a passing message rather than a memorial.

It seems that the disciples went very quiet after that, and kept the events of that day to themselves for the time being.

The next day Jesus, Simon, Peter and James made their way down the mountain to join the crowds below again, and re-enter the day to day realities of life.

They were soon met with a problematic scene – there was a man with an epileptic son whom the other disciples had tried, but failed. to heal.

Jesus healed the boy and handed him back to his father but not before Jesus had lamented:-

‘O unbelieving and perverse generation – how long shall I put up with you?’

After the healing we are told:-

‘And they were all amazed at the greatness of God’

In this account from Luke why would the wonderful image of the transfiguration be immediately followed by a more prosaic account of healing and a possible lack of faith?

I think that the two events are inextricably linked as, although the moment on the mountain was absolutely necessary, it could not be prolonged before its time. Although Peter would have liked to prolong the glory.

Often there may come to us, today, moments that we would like to prolong indefinitely but after the time on the mountain top we must come back to the battle and routine of life.

That wonderful time is meant to give us strength for life’s everyday struggles. Jesus was returning to face his trial and execution.

Last week we heard how Jesus calmed the storm. As Christians we are not promised a problem free life, but we are promised that we will not struggle alone. Jesus will always be with us. We had very moving testimony from 2 people, in our service last Sunday, about how faith can help us cope with significant physical problems. When Jesus calmed the storm he asked the disciples:-

‘Where is your faith?’

So how were the disciples faring in all this?

I reckon that they would be feeling pretty shell shocked – wondering what was going to happen next (a bit like me on the log flume!)

Jesus repeatedly demonstrated who he was – the Son of God and continued to challenge their faith.

Even though the disciples SAID they understood they were all to desert Jesus only a short time later during his trial and execution. They only really came into full strength after the Resurrection of Jesus and their receiving of the Holy Spirit. They then became heroes of Christianity preaching the Good News healing people, enduring hardship and persecution and even dying for their faith.

The events of the ministry of Jesus then seemed to have struck home at last! Three of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke, all give full accounts of the transfiguration.

Peter later writes a letter to encourage Christians in the Black Sea area by referring directly to his experience of witnessing the transfiguration. He emphasises that it was a true happening:-

'We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain'

2 Peter:16-18

Conclusion

I think that the question remains for us today:-

Where is our faith?

We have not witnessed the events of Jesus' ministry as the disciples did but we have their first hand testimony to follow.

We may often feel baffled by events and can't see what God's purpose may be. Yet it is not for us to fully understand, but to believe and trust in Him.

Jesus Christ has opened the way for us to have a personal relationship with God the Father – no matter who we are or what we have done.

The disciples struggled to understand Jesus, yet were able to carry on, very effectively, after his death on the cross, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Do we recognise Jesus for who he is?

God is still speaking to us today:-

'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'

The question remains:-

Are we listening?

We can take courage from the words of St Paul in his letter to the Philippians:-

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus'

Amen