

Mark 9: 2-9

The Transfiguration

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Now, a farmer turns up to evensong and discovers that he and the new vicar are the only people there.

“What shall we do?” asks the vicar.

“Well,” replies the farmer, “If I goes to feed my sheep and only one turns up, I feeds her.”

So, after four hymns, two sung canticles, one sung psalm, two lessons, prayers for everything under the sun and a twenty minute sermon the service ends.

“So how did I do?” the vicar asked the farmer.

“Well, if I goes to feed my sheep and only one turns up, I feeds her,” he said, “but I don’t give her the whole bag full!”

So when I was preparing this talk, I reflected back on the one I gave last Month based on Mark 1, concerning Christ’s baptism – and here we have is this passage the second time that God proclaims Jesus as his son, his beloved.

At his baptism, that celebrates the first Sunday in Epiphany, it was “You are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased”

And at the Transfiguration, which marks the end of Epiphany, it is “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

In a way, neatly bookended.

Now, given today is also when the world celebrates the martyrdom of St Valentine, the day of cherubs, chocolate and cards, I might be forgiven for focussing on the phrase ‘whom I love’ that appears in both sets of verse. In both cases the Greek text uses the term agapetos – the

beloved – often translated as divine fatherly, selfless unconditional love, the love of God for man and of man for God.

But instead I'd like to consider the context of today's gospel and that last command, "listen to him!"

Jesus' transfiguration is one of the six seminal events in his life and sits at the centre of Mark's gospel. It is God's way of showing the disciples (and reader) that change is in the air.

Change is what this gospel text is all about and it starts with the very first words: "Six days later." Six days after Jesus has just told them what is to happen to him, his death and resurrection, and how his followers must behave – to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.

We then read that Jesus was no longer seen by the disciples to be just the doer of miracles, the earthly Judaic Messiah, he became the miracle, the Jesus who is the son of God, the divine, the beloved. And at that moment of the transfiguration, the disciples too started a journey of personal change, of realisation, changing from followers into believers.

Therefore, this transfiguration isn't just about what happened to Christ, but it's also about our lives, what we must do to be faithful to him as his followers, as believers, as Christians.

Undoubtedly, the disciples know something is about change. They have made drastic changes in their lives to follow Jesus, but like the rest of us there is only so much change they can tolerate. In the passage we have Peter wanting to build shelters for Moses, Elijah and Jesus as if wanting to root them in his own traditions and just stay on the mountain

Now in my professional life I deal with change every day and help my clients implement and sustain those changes. There is a very well

known academic model about people's reaction to change, the Kübler-Ross model that explains how people move through various stages of morale and competence - from an initial surprise or shock to denial and disbelief, frustration that things are different, to depression or grief, then experimenting with engagement, acceptance and learning how to exist in the new situation through to full integration of the change. Not everyone goes through all stages, or at the same rate when responding to change, but one thing is clear, change is not simple and on our own it is not easy.

Christians are people of change. We read about it, we pray for it. We witness how our faith has changed our lives. Take for example the quote from the Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard "Prayer does not change God, but it changes those who pray"

So, as we enter the season of Lent on Wednesday, change will be in the air, and not just the reopening of the Church Buildings next Sunday. Many of us will use Lent as an opportunity to change some bad habits, while others will change their daily routines by taking on spiritual disciplines.

All this change can help us focus on the cross.

And one thing we have learned from Christians who have walked before us is that when you change your focus toward the cross it can change your life. One might even say, it is change we can believe in.

Let us pray:

Lord, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; the courage to change the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen