

Celebration!

Reading

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!



Reflection

We pray...

Transforming God, you are with us as we change and grow into our best selves. You connect us to those who came before us and enfold us today. Help us be the people you call us to be. Amen.

Illustrated Ministries

Isn't this a fabulous story?! "Fabulous" being the operative word!

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain.

And while they are there, a change comes over Jesus, other translations describe it as a "transfiguration", and his clothes become "shining" or "dazzling" white - and I love this detail in Mark's account of the story - whiter than any washing or bleaching could make them! (9:3)

And then Elijah and Moses appear chatting with Jesus (9:4).

The disciples are terrified and Peter blurts out his intention to stay there forever (9:5-6).

And then a cloud covers them and they hear a voice: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (9:7)

As quickly as it began, it seems, they are heading down the mountain again being sworn to secrecy "until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead." (9:8-9)

But what is this story about and why should we attend to it?

The worldwide church recognises this story as one of the pivot points in Jesus' life and ministry. It is just as important as the story of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It appears in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). The remembering of the story of the Transfiguration acts as a pivot or transition as we move away from the Celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany into Lent and our preparations for celebrating Easter.

It is a sacred moment that holds us between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of his ministry and his journey towards Jerusalem and the cross. And in this sacred moment, Jesus, witnessed by the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) and his disciples, the past and the present, is once again affirmed by God.

It is a transitional moment - for Jesus, and for the disciples - and as we ponder the story, may it be also transitional, transfiguring, for us.

So imagine yourself on that mountain with Jesus.

Imagine seeing him change before your eyes - we don't have any details about that beyond the shining white of his clothes - but something is happening and you know it is important, special, sacred.

Then Elijah and Moses appear - significant people in the stories of the people of Israel - a prophet, the law-giver - leaders of God's people. Jesus is not just placed alongside them, God's voice clearly affirms Jesus - gathering up the past and the present, says God, this Jesus, the one you have followed from Galilee, this Jesus, is my Son. I love him."

The words God used at Jesus' baptism are repeated here: "My beloved." "I love him"
And then a clear instruction - "Listen to him!"

If they were in any doubt, any questions about who Jesus is are answered for the disciples, for us, in this one experience.

And yet it manages to raise so many more questions - as Peter's reaction shows.

To be fair, with all your heroes gathered in one place, wouldn't you want to stay there too?! I would! It would be amazing just to sit at their feet and listen for a while.

But staying on the mountain is not the point of the experience.

The experience is given to strengthen and encourage all of them as they return back down the mountain and face the days ahead. In Mark's gospel, this experience comes between Jesus telling the disciples of the hard road of discipleship - of losing their life to gain it (8:34-38) and that in heading to Jerusalem, Jesus is heading towards his death (9:31). So this experience again reminds them of God's presence through whatever lies ahead, and fixes their eyes on God's chosen one.

Jesus is affirmed as at his baptism - reinforcing his own identity before God. That must have been important to him as he faced the hostility of religious authorities in the days and weeks to come.

And the disciples, likewise, are reassured - and they are going to need every ounce of courage they gained as they accompany Jesus down the mountain and on towards Jerusalem.

Today, we affirm the calling of a group of people to serve as Elders and members of Church Council. They also need courage (!) as they guide us in sharing in God's ministry in the world. Their priority is to build up the congregation in faith and love, sustain us all in hope, and to lead us to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world - no pressure!

And later during our congregational meeting, we will all need courage as we consider the next step in our future together here at Kiama, and we commit ourselves to the ministry to which Christ calls us.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration points us towards the God who calls each one of us. This Jesus, God's son, loved by God, comes to us and has something to say - listen to him! And around this table, we remember, every time we gather here, that God's love for us and for all people is boundless. Here, we are reminded that God loves us and calls us together as God's people. Here, God sustains and renews us. Here, God meets us and sends us to love God's world.

We pray...

We hear of your divine voice, transforming God, and hope for new and deeper understandings of the ministries to which you call us. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the one you love, and as we do, may we experience a broader understanding of what it means to be disciples of the Christ. Amen.

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