

MARK 9:2-9
ST JOHN'S; 11.2.18; 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

Just who is Jesus? In the previous chapter, Mark's told the story of Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi: *You are the Messiah* (Mark 8:29). That would seem to be quite clear. Jesus' disciples had seen and heard enough of Jesus' extraordinary ministry and teaching, to be convinced that he was no ordinary Rabbi. And when Peter blurted out, *You are the Messiah*, the penny must have dropped with the rest of them as well. But Jesus went on calling himself *the Son of Man* (8:31,38), and saying that he was going to *suffer much and be rejected . . . and be put to death* (Mark 8:31). His friends must have been very confused. They weren't expecting a Messiah who suffered and bled and died.

Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain . . . (v 2). Mountain-top encounters with God punctuate the whole of Scripture. In Genesis 22, the Lord stops Abraham sacrificing Isaac on a mountain *in the land of Moriah*. In Exodus, Moses goes up Mount Sinai to meet with God several times. Elijah had significant encounters with God on both Mount Carmel and Mount Sinai (1 Kings 18 and 19). Today we read of Jesus' transfiguration happening on a mountain-top. And of course, Jesus' ascension happened on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).

As we think a bit more about Jesus' transfiguration, we're going to consider what happened to Jesus; the roles played by the other people

present: Peter, James and John, and Moses and Elijah; and the action of God the Father.

JESUS: GLORY REVEALED AND CONCEALED

Last Sunday, we heard the beginning of John's gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .* (John 1:1). Before that first Christmas, *the Word was with God* – he was in glory in what we call heaven. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he surrendered his glory so he could come and live among us. His identity was concealed and then gradually and partially revealed to those who had eyes to see.

John says that Jesus revealed his glory by changing water into wine at Cana. The implication is that he revealed his glory in all his other signs, or miracles, as well. Here at the transfiguration, Peter, James and John catch a glimpse of the glory Jesus *had with [the Father] before the world was made* (John 17:5). But the moment at which Jesus' glory was most fully revealed on earth was as he hung on the cross. It wasn't the obvious, visible glory, which Peter, James and John witnessed on the mount of transfiguration. But in the horror and pain, the darkness and death of the cross, Jesus revealed his glory, he triumphed over the powers of evil, suffering and death, he won salvation and opened the way into the holy of holies for any who would receive it.

Following Jesus' death, his glory was more clearly revealed, in his resurrection and ascension. And John describes his vision of Jesus risen, ascended, and glorified, in the book of Revelation.

For thirty years or so, God's Son lived on this earth as a human being, concealing his glory. But even during those years, there were moments when those around him caught glimpses of his glory. The transfiguration was one of those moments.

PETER, JAMES AND JOHN

We don't know why the Lord chose only Peter, James and John to witness his glory in this way. These three did share many experiences from which the rest of the disciples were excluded.

Peter had seen enough of Jesus' glory revealed in his ministry to have come to the point of declaring him to be the Messiah. But what happens on this occasion is something completely different. Very briefly, the veil between earth and heaven is drawn aside, and the disciples see the glory of heaven. It's overwhelming – Peter and the others are terrified. Dazzling light, followed by a cloud – both are signs of the presence of the God who led his people through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). Peter and the others hear a voice speaking from the cloud: *This is my own dear Son – listen to him!* (v 7).

Peter and John both referred to this event in their later writings. John refers to it at the beginning of his gospel: *we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). Peter writes in his second letter: *With our own eyes we saw his greatness. We were there when he was given honour and glory by God the Father, when the voice came to him from the Supreme Glory, saying, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased!" We*

ourselves heard this voice coming from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18). They might not have understood what happened at the time, but later they did – and it was an experience they never forgot!

MOSES AND ELIJAH

Just as we might ask why Peter, James and John but not the other disciples, so we might ask why Moses and Elijah, but not Abraham, David, or any other OT heroes?

There are a number of possible reasons. Malachi had prophesied, *but before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah* (Malachi 4:5), and Moses himself had promised that God *will send you a prophet like me from among your own people* (Deuteronomy 18:15). Their appearance now shows that the time has come for the fulfilment of God's promises. They were two of three OT figures who disappeared from the earth in strange circumstances – the third was Enoch (Genesis 5:24; Deuteronomy 34:6; 2 Kings 2:11). And Moses and Elijah together witness to the Law and the Prophets.

GOD THE FATHER

Just as God the Father spoke at Jesus' Baptism, confirming Jesus' identity as his Son, so he speaks here for the benefit of the disciples, and possibly gently rebuking Peter for speaking when he should be listening! As I said at the beginning, the disciples' must have been very confused over the previous week, as they tried to come to terms with the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, and the predictions of his suffering and death. On the mountain, the inner circle of three heard

the voice of God the Father himself, confirming Jesus' identity as his *own dear Son*, and demanding that they listen to all he had to say (v 7).

CONCLUSION

It's not necessarily clear how we should respond to this event, two thousand years later! We have the advantage over Peter, James and John that day. They didn't really understand who Jesus is until after his crucifixion and resurrection – we live in a time when we can look back on it all with the benefit of two thousand years of hindsight, the complete canon of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.

In this passage we hear two commands. Firstly, God the Father commands Peter, James and John to listen to Jesus. That's always a good thing to do! We're very fortunate, because we have the written records of Jesus' ministry – what he did as well as what he said – as well as the rest of the Scriptures. We do well to study them, both by ourselves ideally on a daily basis, and as often as we can in discussion with fellow-Christians. Listening to Jesus, seeking to obey his instructions, allowing his word to transform us, are all part of obeying the Father's command given here.

The second command we hear in this passage is spoken by Jesus on the way back down the mountain. He ordered Peter, James and John, *Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from death* (v 9). Sadly, many of us seem to think that we shouldn't tell anyone even two thousand years after Jesus rose from death! We're called to "Go, tell everyone", and invite them to join us in worshipping and adoring our risen, ascended and glorified Lord and Saviour, who

was prepared to surrender his glory so that we might ultimately join him in his Father's house.