

Transfiguration Sunday

19th February 2012

2 Kings 2:1-12 Psalm 50:1-6 2 Corinthians 4:3-12 Mark 9:2-9

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In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

On Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we join with the church around the world as we receive the imposition of ashes and begin the season of Lent. And it is easy for us to see the season of Lent and the other liturgical seasons in the same light that we appreciate the seasons of nature; winter follows summer and the cycle of seasons repeats each year. In some ways that is a helpful appreciation, because if we miss Lent, then we know it will be there for us again next year —similar to those times when we miss the bus, it's good to know another one will come along. And that does underline one aspect of the church's orientation; it offers us many and endless opportunities to engage and encounter ourselves, each other and God.

When we look at today's readings we see that they tell of two quite different journeys: Elisha walks with Elijah on a journey and Peter, James and John accompany Jesus on a journey. They are timely readings for they also give us an opportunity to see Lent as a **journey**, a journey with a clear starting point, and an orientation; however, a journey where the destination is clouded in the mystery of Easter. And as we approach Lent in the context of a journey, we might also be drawn into re‡ecting on our life in that same metaphor of journeying.

So, what inspiration do we find for our Lent journey as we look at the journeys narrated in today's readings? Elisha follows, or walks with Elijah to Bethel, Jericho and then on to the Jordan; and before we look at the actual journey it is worth looking at those three reference points for the journey. Bethel, translates to "House of God", and that was the first place visited. Next is Jericho, which is the lowest permanently inhabited site on earth. It is also believed to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. And then the Jordan. Currently, the river serves as the eastern border of the State of Israel, that is the eastern edge of our traditional heritage. It is also the place that marks the crossing into freedom, the place of homecoming for the exodus, and in our tradition, Jesus was baptised in the Jordan by John the Baptist. The place where ministry begins.

What an amazing journey and their starting point as stated in verse 1, *they were on their way from Gilgal.* This is more difficult as there are many references to different places called Gilgal. The main mention of Gilgal is when the Book of Joshua states that the Israelites first encamped there after having crossed the Jordan River. In the narrative, after setting up camp, Joshua orders the Israelites to take twelve stones from the river, one for each tribe, and place them there in memory. And other references to other places called Gilgal might also be references to other circles of standing stones. And that makes this journey for us today even more amazing, for when the East End was commissioned , Graham, the architect, offered a poem called "Circle of broken stones';
We have gathered broken stones,
and circled this bare patch of sand,
to realise the beauty here,
already shining, each sunrise.
Maybe the Journey of Elisha and Elijah is our journey and it begins here in this place!

As we look at the progress of the journey, we see that at each place the same dialogue takes place.
Elijah, the master, tells Elisha to "*Stay here*': Stay in the circle of Stones that is St Paul-s, stay in Bethel, the House of God, stay in Jericho, the lowest inhabited site on earth, stay at the Jordan, the place where your ministry begins. And at each stage of the journey the prophets say to Elisha, *"Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?"* The repetition almost emphasizes our own curiosity, what is the voice of authority that Elisha listens to? When his master, Elijah asks him to stay, Elisha replies, *"As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."* And to the voice of the prophets his response is, *"Yes, I know; keep silent."* So, what is the voice of authority that Elisha listens to?

It is not that Elisha goes against Elijah, for what we find at the end of the narrative is that he honours and seeks the same as what his master has. He seeks to inherit, to become what he sees in his master. Elisha is not 'listening÷ to his master-s voice, rather he seeks his master-s very being. This journey illuminates the process of following in the fullest sense of the word. It is not a journey of listening, it is a journey of being and of becoming, a movement into the inheritance that reflects an indwelling God, or as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians: *it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light*

In Mark-s gospel, the story of the transfiguration narrates another journey, Peter, James and John accompany Jesus on a journey and they are *"led ... up a high mountain apart, by themselves.*' And what they find on their journey is

overwhelming, so much so, they *did not know what to say, for they were terrified*. Peter wants to hold on, and contain the moment: *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."*

What Peter, James and John see, their perspective is perhaps another example of the 2 Corinthians "*Let light shine out of darkness*'. For it is described as an overwhelming brightness. The inclusion of Moses and Elijah in their field of vision suggests that their past tradition is there alongside all that is revealed in Christ. And building three dwellings to contain all three is a typical "Peter' orientation —seeking to have one's cake and eat it too! If we consider the energy of this journey, the holding on, the past coming up into the present field of view, we might see that this is the very energy that needs to experience transfiguration. And like Peter when we find ourselves at the very point of transfiguration we too can relate to where Peter found himself: *He did not know what to say, for they were terrified*.

What changes the whole picture is *a voice*, and the reality of hearing and knowing that the divine voice speaks of a new reality: *"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"* And that voice, or the hearing of that voice creates a new perspective: *8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus*.

Each and every journey, each and every Lent and each and every life has a starting point, an orientation and a movement. We in our modern world are more often only aware of a destination as the point of a journey. What the two journeys we've read of today tell us is that there is more to be discovered in attending to the journey than there is in looking for the destination..

As we approach Lent, we might take these stories with us as our google maps, and use them to reference our own becoming as we embark on our journey into the mystery of what lies within and beyond Lent.

The Lord be with you
Peter Humphris