

***'Listen to him!'***

*Now about eight days after these sayings [Jesus] took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. (Luke 9:28-36 ESV)*

We began this time after Christmas – this revelation time – this manifestation of God with us by star light – guiding the Magi to the house where Jesus the toddler was. The Epiphany was there for all to see but as usual not recognised as Jesus' parents fled into Egypt and he became a refugee. Today we close this portion of the church year or pick up the theme of God with us in the brightest of sunlight – and I don't mean the type of sunshine you'd get on a nice perfect Australian day! No, this sunshine wasn't up in the sky but very close, too close for comfort one might say, for the dazzling white – not an advertisement for washing powder – was coming from Jesus. He and his clothes were transformed or rather transfigured. And again the disciples don't recognise what is going on as heard by Peter's rather demented comment about setting up lodging for three. We can imagine the disciples' confusion, trying to process what they see but they're not afraid yet it seems but that happens when a cloud overshadows them – not blocking out the sunlight from above as clouds usually do – but somehow encompassing them on the mountain top with the dazzling Jesus. The cloud is the Old Testament revelation or manifestation of God – his very presence hidden and revealed – whereas Moses and Elijah are the messengers. The three disciples have grown up with the Old Testament stories of Moses and Mount Sinai and the terror of the presence of God, the holy God is close! What will happen to them? Nothing it seems for they hear a voice from the cloud 'This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!' and they are left with only Jesus – no cloud, no dazzling white, no Moses, no Elijah – just themselves and Jesus.

We imagine it a very powerful moment but we pause and take note of the fact that it is rarely mentioned in the New Testament. We don't have a focus on this event for 2,000 years – we don't hear continually 'we follow Jesus who shines like the sun!'. The event is mentioned in the New Testament – most notably in 2 Peter – *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18 ESV)*

Peter's reference to witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus is to say that what was most important was the voice they heard – ears trump eyes every time in Christianity.

But back to the mountain. Luke gives us some interesting details when you compare his account with Matthew and Mark. Two things to point out this morning. Firstly, that we get an idea of what Moses and Elijah and Jesus were talking about – his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. This departure or 'exodus' – a term we've heard before in the Old Testament – is about God's rescue of his people. Jesus knew what this would cost – each Gospel account records that, prior to going up the mountain, Jesus told his confused disciples about his future arrest, humiliation, crucifixion and death and that the Son

of Man would be raised on the third day. Jesus was not unaware of his future and maybe going up the mountain – out of sight – not really but metaphorically closest to heaven – was not only to pray for strength but also a temptation – just slip away – open ‘the door in heaven’ and ‘go home’. We can’t psychologise this moment but if we were to say that this was a forerunner of another prayer time with disciples but now in a garden, then we can understand or perhaps it is better to say ‘sense’ that this event of Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah is important for Jesus. After Jesus is risen from the dead he will describe his life as fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. The paradox is that this Jesus glowing white is undoubtedly glorious but he is talking about a time – his death in Jerusalem – where he will not look white and glowing but instead he will be covered in blood and darkness – even God will turn his face away – but it is that moment that Moses and Elijah to point to – and it is that moment that is Jesus at his most glorious. Of course it is a paradox for Christians and for the world it is sheer nonsense.

The second point is to note Peter’s attempt to keep Moses and Elijah here and the whole thing continuing with his three tents proposal because he says this when Moses and Elijah are departing. It is understandable. We so want to keep our experiences going – good ones of course – supernatural ones especially. In this we are ‘experience junkies’ uncritically going for ‘pleasure is good’ and ‘pain is bad’. But it only takes a moment to pause and think ... no, pleasure can be harmful to us and pain can be beneficial ... because what is important at all times is context and meaning which determines our behaviour, our choices, and what is going on. For Peter, James, and John their lesson was very quick and to the point – to understand what you’re seeing, to process what is happening, to learn from this experience you need to ‘listen to Jesus’. Left to themselves we have no idea how the three would have processed this experience. Perhaps they might have considered Moses and Elijah more important to have around! Who knows? But even as Jesus was glowing white and proclaimed the Son of God, the disciples are told ‘Listen to him’.

I imagine that all of us would like to have such a mountain-top experience – to see the supernatural – to see Jesus – to have ‘confirmation’ that we’re not deluded in following Jesus. We can’t imagine such an experience harming us – so why not, God? Now I’m not saying that experiences are unimportant – they can be most significant – but and there is a but – they are ephemeral – they end and they get transferred to memory and fall into the past. We may then even doubt them, or misremember them, or read into them stuff that wasn’t there the first time. They don’t necessarily stay with us – we have to recall them. Peter saw Jesus transfigured and yet Peter still denied Jesus three times. You might feel on Cloud 9 on the day of your wedding but still want to kill your spouse at some stage years later and recalling the experience of your wedding only goes so far.

What we need to help us with faith and trust is a commitment, an anchor, a guarantee – as far as possible – and in Christianity that is God’s Word – the story of God and his rescue of humanity and creation culminating in the story of Jesus, who he is and what he has done. God directs us to our ears – to hearing – because the words stay with us – and they point to the greatest glory of all – Jesus’ departure in Jerusalem – where Lent will take us all as we go down the mountain to a cross and then an empty tomb.

The words tell us simply what to do – ‘Listen to him’.