

Sermon 2 March 2014
“Attentive to Mystery and Prophecy” Mt 17:1-9 2 Peter 1:16-21

Prayer: God of mystery, prophecy, comfort and challenge, stretch out your hand to touch our lives. May we attend to your mystery and hear your words of prophecy learning to understand how they work to teach us how to be more like Jesus, light of the world. Amen.

Today we have been told our focus this morning is to be attentive – like in the ‘old’ days when crossing the road. Look, listen then cross. Because the subjects we are told to focus on “Mystery and Prophecy”, I thought of this point in an Indiana Jones ‘experience’. I thought that perhaps for most of us this is like stepping into the unknown, while knowing we have to cross – and yes we’d best be attentive if we are going to allow the witness of the text to speak to us today.

Today is what we call ‘Transfiguration Sunday’ in traditional Church language; and it marks the closing of the season of Epiphany, the season of light. If you remember Epiphany began with us celebrating the arrival of the ‘Wise-men, the Magi from the East. They established that the baby Jesus was the ‘child’ of God, the light of the world. Epiphany season began with the revelation from the Magi of the promise of the change ‘this’ child’s life will bring to all people and ends with the secret of the freedom that Christ’s death and resurrection will bring.* (seasons)

So our focus is shifting from what the ‘light of the world reveals for us’, namely the examination of the teachings of Jesus on life ethics and morals e.g. the ‘Beatitudes’ etc that have been our subjects in the past weeks! Now we are called into the season of Lent and it begins this coming Wednesday, Ash Weds. Lent is the 6 weeks leading into Easter; a time of preparation for the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

What Matthew’s text tells us today is that we end Epiphany with “A shining *Mystery*”:

- a light from God that is so bright – it cannot be reproduced or copied by earthly means;
- *¹a dazzling vision of Jesus on a mountain-top in which heaven and earth, history and future, all come together with sun, cloud, past prophets, and a voice from above to reveal the unique and beloved nature of Jesus as God’s son. (*¹seasons);
- *²a flash of brilliant, blinding revelation that illuminates not only who Jesus is (just in case that wasn’t clear by now), but also Jesus’ mysterious words about his coming suffering, death, and rising again (during which it will be especially important to remember who he is).(*² K Matthews-Huey);
- a mystery, stepping out into the unknown for us, following prophecy and the witness of those who were there... cV

Jesus took three disciples up a mountain and in that experience they were shown more of “**who**” he was, reminded of ‘**whose**’ he was and *I would like to think* were given another ‘plank’ of a bridge to step onto into the unknown. We know with a longer view Jesus turned to Jerusalem, the cross and resurrection... but with the closer sight of ‘now’, Peter didn’t know what to do.

It can be pretty scary when someone close to you has a ‘Mountain top experience’, has a spiritual experience and you ‘happen to have been invited along’. The disciples were scared! Peter tries to contain the issue, build three booths, anchoring the ‘event’ to the mountain top and be able to come back and ‘remember’, But Js won’t let him ‘contain’ nor display the experience like this. The light of God, the light of God’s presence changes everything; the text says “Jesus was transfigured” right before their very eyes.

The word *transfigured* in verse 2 translates the Greek verb *metamorphoo*. Elsewhere in the New Testament that verb is used to suggest changes deep within a person. The story of Jesus’ transfiguration uses outward details to hint at the deeper mystery of metamorphosis. Hints at the deeper changes that would happen within the disciples – **and all who in turn** witness the ‘light of God in Christ’. Cv

The power of the presence of God **is** scary, and the absolutely crucial fact in this is to stay within the light where Jesus can touch and say ‘do not fear.’ This is really important, I do not know how many times I

have been saddened by stories from people who have experienced a 'God- Jesus – light -transfiguration' **but not experienced** /perhaps not trusted the touch of Jesus saying 'do not fear', because whether they acknowledge it or not – they are still scared, and it blocks them from being free to move in the light and discover the changes are good. *For the disciples immediately* after addressing their fear and comforting them, Jesus led them down the mountain. It is as if the brilliance of the presence of God has blinded **us** from seeing the **whole** episode, applying the learning's, enabling all who see the Light of Christ not to be sacred and leading them safely down. Cv

Experiencing the light of God in Jesus was important *for the disciples*, even though commanded to be silent about the experience as they came down. We know they did go on to share it and through their witness the early Christians were both comforted and challenged by it. 2 Peter is written to encourage, to call for faithfulness and build faith in what was the second generation of believers.

Scholars tell us that 2 Peter was written around the end of the first century and *beginning of the second. *(Loader) The writer's concern was to respond to questions about an apparent delay in the second coming and therefore whether or not it was foolishness to believe in Jesus or live in his ways. But actually it was more than just believing in Jesus; it was believing in his story, his witness, his life and death and resurrection and his coming again in glory to judge; it was accepting the mystery and truth of prophecy which gave authority to the testimony that Jesus was the Christ, who lived, died, was buried and rose again.

In 2 Peter the *transfiguration serves as a wonderful symbol of the centre of our faith, a kind of vision of the end and the ultimate. **Jesus shines with God-light**. **"That is also what we want to say when we see Jesus bringing good news to the poor and compassion to people who have sunk very low in hope or very low in sin. For a world which celebrated divinity with images of holy mountains and shining light this was a way of affirming that God was in Christ. Ultimately that **is our authority**. The writer of 2 Peter can still find authority for his concerns in this vision. The real contours of Christ's mission, its mountains and valleys, teach us our place and how we need to stand."* (*W Loader) cV

Renown preacher Fred Craddock said: "There is value in referring to this story as one about Jesus' mountaintop experience, which is followed by his return to the valley where he ministered to human need. To such a presentation we can add recitations of mountaintop experiences we have known, followed by exhortations to return to the valley ready to serve. The connections can not only be clear but also encouraging and challenging" (The Christian Century, February 21, 1990).

How do we stand in our world when we return to serve? We, who know what it is to have been invited to a 'mountain top experience of the Divine', been encouraged, managed to come down to the valley below and care enough to keep a hold of Jesus hand. How do we stand facing the challenges in our world without becoming overwhelmed by need, mystery, faith, business, questions, delays, devised myths... Cv

In our lives – our lives with their valley's and mountain top experiences (ever remembered to get to the top you have to do a lot of climbing???) So in our lives in the days where it is all up hill – take comfort there is a top – where mystery and cloud and the presence of the Divine will surround you but remember the challenge of Jesus to keep going which has to be down, eventually to a valley.

Remember this slide?, Indiana Jones has to step out and cross to the other side – and what happened in the story was that as he stepped out, planks appeared before him – the bridge was built and he got to the other side to continue and finish his story...

How we stand at the edge of what we know and step into the unknown is by Divine light, the light of God in Jesus. It is mystery, it is proved true by prophecy, it is only by leaving the mountain top, refusing to let Jesus be kept in a booth on display, addressing our questions and fears and allowing the touch of Jesus, the words of Jesus, the presence of Jesus to comfort and challenge as we keep walking by faith, serving and ministering where ever we are led, uphill and down! Amen