
²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings He [Jesus] took with Him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as He was praying, the appearance of His face was altered, and His clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with Him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” ³⁶ 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)*

In the past week we have had some major news events, both in the nation of Australia as also overseas. Within Australia there has been news of the conviction of George Pell, and this has raised some significant commentary. There has also been some reporting on a ‘name and shame’ regarding various institutions that have not joined the ‘National Redress Scheme for People Who Have Experienced Institutional Child Sexual Abuse’. Unfortunately it was reported that the Lutheran Church of Australia does not intend to join this scheme, whilst this is not true. There is a significant back-story to this and we do not have the time to discuss this today. Suffice to say, the LCA is committed to joining the National Redress Scheme and simply has some administrative matters to work through with the Department of Social Security before the LCA can join.

In all this we are faced with questions about what is ‘real’ and what is not. There is a question about what may be described as ‘real’ and ‘irrefutable facts’ (and isn’t that a whole set of questions these days?!), and then the implications of such ‘facts’ on our lives. And there is a whole set of questions about discerning what is ‘fact’ from what is ‘fake’... Indeed, there are probably many people here today who are aware that people have said things about them that is untrue, or have experienced someone presenting something as ‘true’ (where indeed something may be so), but the presentation of such is from a limited point of view and a personal agenda that does not pay proper respect towards all concerned. How do you know what is ‘real’? How do we discern what is ‘real’ and ‘true’ when listening to others...?

When we come to the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is asking us to consider what is 'real' and what is not. To many people this might appear as a 'fantastical story' and one of those 'stories of faith' that is not grounded in any real 'reality'. But what if what is recorded in the Bible is true? (And of course, this is the substance of our faith – it is true). And if what is recorded is true, then what does this really mean for us in life?

The account of the Transfiguration of Jesus presents us with a completely different view of 'reality' than what is commonly seen in our world today. Stop for a moment and think what it means that two people (Moses and Elijah) who had died centuries beforehand are seen with Jesus. We may have many questions here (such as how did Peter, James and John know it was Moses and Elijah?). Think also of both that incredible sight of Jesus shining with such a bright glory, and the cloud with the voice. What does this say about the way we see 'reality'?

We may indeed have many questions about what happened at the mount of transfiguration. But here we have one of the great events in Jesus' life on earth that also reflects on our view of 'reality'.

Our Gospel Reading for today clearly affirms that in Jesus God is at work in the world, and that apart from Jesus we will never know God. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "I and the Father are one.... Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." And this is affirmed in the Bible Reading for today with its many parallels from what we call 'The Old Testament' and God's activity through Moses and Elijah (who met with Jesus)

There are many parallels in our Scripture Reading today (in the story of the Transfiguration) with stories and events of the Old Testament. There is the light and the cloud which reflects the light and the cloud which lead the people through the wilderness; and which also signified God's presence in the Temple. There is Moses and Elijah who represent so many things. There is the conversation about Jesus' 'departure' – in Greek 'exodus', recalling God's deliverance of His people. There is the very word of God being spoken (the same word which created the world, and which reshaped God's people through the words of the prophets). And there is that special encounter with God on the top of the mountain - matching not only Old Testament appearances - but also reminding us of Mt. Zion (where the Temple was) and that God is to be met in worship.

The fact that thousands upon thousands of people have testified to the truth of these words (people who were at the Exodus, and who remained in the community of faith; people who knew the prophets of old and repeated their words; people who walked with Jesus while He walked this earth and continued to testify about Him) all ask the question of 'who' or 'what' we 'listen to' to determine what is 'real' and what is not.

From the cloud came a voice, declaring that Jesus was His Son and His chosen One, His Son and His Anointed Servant. Note how God takes the attention off Moses and Elijah and concentrates it on Jesus. They are not to regard the others as of primary importance but to concentrate on Him as the One to Whom Moses and Elijah had borne witness, the One Who had brought ultimate truth. He was essentially the One to Whom they had to listen, for He had come from His Father's presence as a Light into the world. He is a greater than Moses and the Law. He is greater than Moses or Elijah as representative of all the prophets. He is God's final Word.

We are called to 'listen to Him'. Here there is a reflection of Deuteronomy 18:15. He is God's final Voice. And this command to listen to Jesus is a preface to all of Jesus' teaching that follows to His disciples about His journey to the cross. But we note that the disciples would neither listen well nor carry out their tasks faithfully—until after the resurrection. They would fail to heal a boy with a demon (9:37-43). They would fail to understand Jesus' warning about his betrayal (9:43-45). They would argue about which one of them was the greatest (9:46-48). They would not understand Jesus prediction of his death and resurrection (18:31-34). Peter would deny Jesus (22:54-62). They would stand at a distance while Jesus was crucified (23:49).

In our Second Reading this day (2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2) we read: ¹⁴ "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

Within these words God is calling us to reflect on the reality of life, not only in terms of observable experience, but the spiritual realities of sin and death. And in the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, together with His journey to the cross that follows, we see God speaking to us of a deeper reality than our flesh would see.

The reality is that our world experiences suffering and pain, and even death. And we do as well. But God is involved in all creation. You don't have to have the greatest music in worship, or some 'mountain top experience' from some 'inspiring speaker' to be 'drawn close to God' – because God is already close to you!

Yes – we may be 'drawn closer to God' through deeds of love, or the inspiration of nature, or through some 'inspiring camp or speaker'. But – and we are to remember this quite clearly – the place where we see God is not in our human experiences, or our meditations upon the creation, or our good deeds – but in Christ Himself who suffered and died for us. And we know we are joined to Jesus.

Through the Apostle (Romans 6:3-4) Paul God says, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." St. Mark also records Jesus saying (Mark 14:22-24), "This is My body... This is My blood.... shed for you..." And Jesus says (John 5:39): "These are the Scriptures that testify about Me." And through these means, Christ comes to us all.

God is always with you. In Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection and ascension for all people, God calls to us to see this world from a different point of view... We look at life from the point of view of Jesus' life, including the words he spoke to people.

And remember, no matter where you may 'be' in life (be it a 'high' or a 'low') God is always with you. Jesus has brought about an amazing change to all creation. Your life (your 'reality') is already 'changed' for the better through Jesus. So, listen to Him. Amen.