

Seeing in a new light

Mark 9: 2-9

The Match

When we here the phrase to see someone or something in a new light, we generally mean that we perceive, or understand someone or something in a new, and typically more positive way.

One memorable example of this was at my place of work, many years ago, when a new chap had started working in the office. Very quiet, unconfident, and nervous. He was about nine months in, when an event came round which always captured the focus of the entire company – the annual office versus warehouse football match!

An occasion where inter-company pride was at stake; where disputes could be settled; and where the victors would enjoy frequent reminiscence about their achievement.

It was discovered that the new guy, was a goalkeeper and although reluctant to do so, he was persuaded to play. Well, when the match kicked off he was transformed: booming instructions to his defenders, roaring encouragement to his teammates and pulling off a string of spectacular saves that secured a win for the office team for the first time in many years. “We’ve seen you in a new light” he was told, for a long time afterwards.

Transfiguration

Hold that in your mind as we move from the ridiculous to the sublime, the events in the middle of Mark’s Gospel, are presented to us as the time when three of the disciples, Peter, James and John began to look at Jesus in a new way, to literally see him, and everything in a new light.

Mark tells us of this extraordinary moment, where Jesus stands between Elijah and Moses, all of them bathed in the bright and radiant presence of God. Jesus seen here as the fulfilment of the Law (Moses), and the Prophets (Elijah). His full authority is assured by the voice of God, instructing, and encouraging the terrified disciples to listen to him. Jesus at the transfiguration is presented as the ultimate fulfilment that the entire Jewish people were waiting and hoping for.

Some think that this was a preview of the resurrection, but that wasn’t to be spoken of just yet, which is why Peter, James and John were told to say nothing yet.

Before they, or anyone else, could even begin to understand what the joy of resurrection would mean to their lives, and indeed to everyone’s and everything, they first had to learn

about the challenges and breadth of discipleship. Their minds needed to be expanded, their confidence grown, their vision extended.

Before they could see Jesus again in his resurrection body, they first had to see his broken body on the cross; before they could again see him standing between Moses and Elijah, they had to see him hanging between two crucified criminals; before they could continue his work, they had to see the kingdom of God was something far beyond their immediate surroundings.

For the disciples, there had to be preparation before progression.

Lent

So to bring all of this up to today, it is interesting that the transfiguration reading comes just before the Church is about to embark on the season of Lent on Wednesday.

Traditionally, as well as the focus on fasting and giving or taking things up; Lent was always a time when baptism candidates would spend time learning more about the faith into which they were being baptised; and they would enter into patterns of prayer and reflection. All of this was done to enable and inspire the baptised person, and this was mostly adults, to begin lives of resurrection joy and service after Easter, across the breadth of discipleship.

So, Lent continues to invite the Church to see faith and discipleship in a new way. It is when we prepare ourselves to hear again of the crucifixion and resurrection, so how well we use our time in Lent can really help see these two events in a new light each year.

Knowing that at the end of Lent, the transfigured and resurrected Christ will be waiting for us, eager and ready to deepen and progress his relationship with us, in these next weeks, we, like Peter, James and John are given the opportunity to expand our minds, grow our confidence, and extend our vision.

Five Marks of Mission

If all this sounds terrifying, then that is understandable, and you know how Peter, James and John might have felt. But it needn't be. If we really want to grow our faith, to broaden the ways we might serve God and to allow Christ to draw closer to us, then can I encourage you to take one of these booklets with you, and, if you can, come along to one of our Lent Conversations.

This booklet is a companion along the journey of Lent; it has a short Bible reading a question each day to help get us thinking a bit more deeply about our own lives of discipleship and following Christ. It is all based on what the Anglican Communion, of which the Church of England is a part, calls the Five Marks of Mission. These Five Marks are ways in which the Church, and that means all of us, are called to live out our faith.

The Lent Conversations will be based on short Videos that Bishop Anne made about the Five Marks, with some guided conversation afterwards.

The Five Marks take us beyond what might be narrow and familiar, and broadens our vision of how Christ longs for his Church to be like today. We may well be surprised about what we learn – and not only about God and the Church, but about ourselves as well. As St Paul wrote, we discover God's light and glory in our own hearts.

But the Five Marks are outward looking as well, calling us to work to change, or we might say transfigure, the way the world works. Transfiguring destructive worldly values to life-giving Christian values; or ignorance to knowledge; or rejecting those in need to welcoming them; turning injustice to justice; and instead of trashing the earth, treasuring it.

Transfigured

Perhaps like that young and nervous goalkeeper, we might feel unconfident and reluctant to take this on – but also like him, each and every one of us has talents and gifts and an abundance of other things that we can offer. I can tell you that after that match he walked round like he was the Managing Director!

Because a lesson of the transfiguration is not only that Peter, James and John got to see Jesus in a new light, but they came to see themselves in a new light, and the world in a new light.

So do see this Lent as a wonderful opportunity to climb the mountain, see things in a new light and draw closer to the transfigured and resurrected Christ. Amen.

Revd Richard Haynes 11. February 2024.

Sunday before Lent, feast of the Transfiguration