

## **Planetary Parade**

Well I wonder if you spent some time this week, outside in the freezing cold, looking up at the skies. Well, if you did, the chances are that like me, and Ruth, and many others, we were looking at the much talked about ‘planetary parade’.

This was billed as a rare and spectacular planetary alignment, featuring seven planets appearing in the night sky simultaneously, the like of which won't happen again until the year 2036. Now although we didn't have binoculars or a telescope to see anything in great detail, we had looked up the instructions on how to identify the planets and where to look for them as they aligned.

So when the sun had set, and these particular lights began to appear, we began to match them up against the instructions. Because we were being deliberate, it seemed like we were sort of *tuning in* to something wonderful. And it's amazing how many others passing by stopped by us to gaze and wonder.

As the planets and stars began to dazzle in the night sky, it was very moving and it genuinely felt like we were experiencing something profound. And those first verses from Genesis certainly came to my mind about God creating the heavens and ordering light to shine in the darkness.

## **Transfiguration**

Light shining is of course a theme for today in the transfiguration of Jesus. I'm sure the story is familiar to many of us: how, eight days after Jesus had been acknowledged by Peter and the disciples as the Messiah, had taken three of them, Peter James and John, up to the top of the mountain where they were dazzled with bright light, as the glory of God filled Jesus.

Peter James and John were, I'm sure, moved by the whole experience and felt like they were experiencing something very profound. This wasn't just about watching; the transfiguration wasn't just about showing God's glory, or Jesus' divinity, but about instructing the disciples to listen.

'This is my Son, my Chosen; *listen* to him!'. Yes, God was assuring them that Jesus was his son and his chosen and carried his glory; and this certainly got their attention, after all they were sleepy and needed a jolt.

But God really needed their attention because he then commanded them to listen to Jesus. This was important and the same instruction goes for all disciples of Jesus from that day to this.

## **Listening**

We spend a lot of our life listening; to each other, to the television, to the radio etc. And it isn't just through hearing that we listen; when we read something or watch something we are in fact listening to someone's opinion or attitude or belief. I wonder who or what do you spend most of your time listening to?

Listening is a challenge though; it isn't easy. Firstly, it helps if you have something decent to listen to in order to engage your mind. I'm not unaware of the irony of what is actually happening at this particular moment. But there are loads of distractions either around us or within us, to prevent us from really listening well.

And if we think about what is happening in the world today, can we really trust what we listen to? Because I am hearing a lot of people in important positions who are doing a lot of talking at the moment, and saying some pretty inaccurate or destructive things; some of which they deny ever having said in the first place. In many cases this is a deliberate ploy.

I read a quotation in the week from Hannah Ardent, a German philosopher who said that:

*“constant lying is not aimed at making the people believe a lie, but at ensuring no one believes anything anymore. The people that can no longer distinguish between truth and lies cannot distinguish between right and wrong. With such a people you can do whatever you want”.*

Hiding lies within truth in order to trick people is how in the Bible the Satan or the devil goes about his business.

So we are reminded again of God's word to the disciples about Jesus:

‘This is my Son, my Chosen; *listen to him!*’

How well do we, as individuals and as a church, listen to Jesus? In services we certainly talk a lot to him – in prayers, in hymns, in liturgy but is it a bit uneven between talking and listening?

Sometimes though our problem is not so much that we **can't** hear Jesus speaking to us but that we find what he is telling us too difficult to hear, so we deliberately **choose** not to listen. Jesus' words can be too challenging for us; they often take us out of our comfort zones; they implore us to think in way that is contradictory to our natural thoughts; they ask us to do the things ourselves that we are normally happy to leave to others; and his words ask us to trust in God without holding ourselves back one iota. Listening to Jesus can seem to be the greatest risk we ever take.

It couldn't have been easy for Jesus to listen on that mountain top. In the conversation that took place with Moses and Elijah, they discussed his departure, or to use the Greek word, his Exodus. This of course was referring to the crucifixion. Could there have been anything more difficult to listen to?

Despite all of that, listening is what God was telling Peter, James and John to do. That is what God is telling us as individuals and us as a church community to do. But he tells us this with the promise that he will help us every step of the way. Don't forget, that when the dazzling light had gone and the cloud went silent and had left,

Jesus was, faithfully to God, and lovingly to the disciples, **still** standing there with them.

## **Lent**

Jesus always has something he wants to tell us, and it's up to us to decide if we want to Tune In in order to hear him. The best ways are of course through his words in the Bible, our prayers, and in a gathering of the church community. Now Lent which begins on Wednesday provides an opportunity for that discipline of tuning in to listen to Jesus.

Yes, by all means give up chocolate or coffee, but be deliberate about *taking something up* as well, something that will enable you to follow God's instructions of listening to him.

Do try and commit to reading the living hope booklet every day and spending some time in reflection; do come along if you can to one of the Lent conversations on Wednesday afternoons or Thursday evenings; or do spend some extra time in prayer, perhaps praying the Examine at the end of the day, a prayer which you'll find in the back of the Shirley parish prayer book - and if you don't have it just ask me or one of the ministry team and we will happily send it to you.

Perhaps what we will hear might seem risky, difficult and hard work but only then can we begin to experience the freedom the joy and the fulfilment that comes from a life of true discipleship. And Christ will still be standing by us, in our midst. And we may then just then experience a moment of moving profundity, like when we looked up at those planets, or when Peter, James and John looked at the transfigured Jesus.

‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ Amen.

*Rev'd Richard Haynes Sunday Next Before Lent 2 March 2025*