

May I speak in the name of the Father...

On Wednesday morning I sat on a small balcony with a cup of coffee, a piece of toast and a newspaper looking out into the English Channel. Its flat gentle waters and small lapping waves forming of breathing rhythm which felt very calm and relaxing. The fresh smell of sea air was strong and the sound of the sea birds almost like a lullaby – and then there was the morning sunshine which fought to break through the clouds and dance upon the waves. I was captured and almost held hostage by its beauty and tranquillity ... and then in one second with the sound of lorry brakes as the delivery truck entered the hotel car park – the moment was gone.

I tried for most of the day to recapture that moment – that perfect moment of calm – and while I did have some very beautiful and peaceful moments it was not the same.

I guess each of us could share a moment in our lives that felt perfect – like nothing could ever move you from the splendid beauty and emotion of that moment – meeting our first love, that perfect holiday, the birth of a child, a kiss, a graduation... any moment really that captures all our attention, emotion and longing.

Today's gospel reading is one of those moments for Peter- one of those moments which you hope will never end and will always be part of who you are. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him up onto a mountain to pray and as he prayed – Jesus appearance changed – Peter was so taken by the vision before him – he wanted to build a tent – he wanted to capture the vision and the voice of God which confirmed who Jesus was.

But Jesus quickly guides Peter back to reality as they walked down the mountain - *he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.* What death they must have wondered – and how could such a death be possible after the vision they had just witnessed.

When I sat on Wednesday morning with my beautiful vision of calm I was really annoyed with the truck which shattered the quiet and brought me back to reality – but this noise was nothing to the words which shattered Peter's hopes and brought him back to reality. Jesus – the Son of Man – the Son whom God loved would die!

Today is the last Sunday before Lent – our last chance for a little party before the Lenten discipline. In some parts of the church is celebrated as Mardi Gras – the last bit of loud celebration and gluttony before the Lenten Fast!! The lectionary gives us this vision of the glory and splendour of

Christ each year before we turn to Ash Wednesday – it reminds us the power of Christ as we prepare to turn and walk towards the cross.

Lent in some ways is about bringing us back to the reality of our faith – it is a time to turn and reflect – to take time to focus on what is important to us – our discipleship in Christ.

So often we read the story of the transfiguration we focus on the transforming of Jesus and Peter's response – but as we approach Lent I want us to think a little about the opening words of the story. *²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.*

At the end of Mark Chapter 8, just before this passage Jesus asks the disciples who people say that he is and they talk about Jesus being like Elijah – and finally Peter states the very phrase which God proclaims in the transfiguration 'The Messiah – son of God'.

This interaction is at the end of a long period of ministry. As we have heard over the past weeks there has been much teaching and healing, many arguments with Pharisee's and a growing understanding of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. At the end of all this Jesus draws them apart and they go away to the mountain – we assume to pray.

In all of the busy-ness of his ministry, in all the work that is still to be done, Jesus takes his key leadership team away – to reflect –to focus – to clarify – and to pray. This is one of the things which Lent offers to us a chance to draw away – to reflect –to focus – to clarify – and to pray.

Lent is not meant to be a dreary time – rather it is a time for us and to take time to re-centre our discipleship. When Jesus took those three disciples up the mountain they saw a vision that would sustain them throughout their whole life and ministry and re-affirm what they knew to be true that Jesus was the son of God.

Our Lenten discipline has the potential to give us the same opportunity. If you take time to look at the Lent resources at the back of church you will notice that traditionally Lent is a time of preparation for Baptism – but also for us to prepare to re-affirm our own vows at the Easter Vigil. It is a time for penance and reconciliation – a time to restore relationships and our sense of peace in the church and in all our relationships.

Lent is a time when we fast to focus and prepare for the mystery of Holy week and Easter – and it is a time when we focus our charity – how we share what we have in the midst of our faith. A little later Meg will share

with us some information about our Lenten Charity which will support provision of much needed medical supplies in Malawi.

So in the 40 days that follow Ash Wednesday we are invited to go with the disciples up the mountain with Jesus to pray and re-affirm our faith – and to be joyful in our relationship with Christ. I wonder what we will find during these 40 days... I wonder if like the disciples we will have a vision that will sustain for the rest of our lives.

The challenge however is not what we see or experience but what we do with it. Will we be tempted like Peter to who tried to contain the vision and not want to leave the mountain? We may have to be prepared to not fully understand what we see and take time to continue explore what God is saying to us. It is helpful to note that in many ways it wasn't until Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter and the disciples finally got the point of the vision they had seen. But when they did, the purpose of their lives took on a new dimension. They started doing the things that Jesus did when he was with them -- teaching, healing, forgiving. But most important, they became witnesses to this glory of God that had been with them in Jesus. They began telling others about this glorious God whose forgiving love had been made real for them in Jesus Christ who died and then was raised from death. That's the purpose of Mark's Gospel: The followers of Jesus have been given the task of telling others the good news about this glory of God. The purpose of faith is not to have "spectacular" and "dramatic" religious experiences for ourselves.

Today on this last Sunday before our Lenten journey – let us be reminded of the wonder and drama of the glory of God. Let us celebrate the mystery of the vision of Christ in our midst – but also let us begin to think about the journey which lays before us – what steps will we take this Lent to make time to walk up the Mountain with Christ and witness fullness of God in our lives. Our faith in Christ is who we are and Lent gives us a period of to be very clear about that. To take time to spend with God and to focus on our relationships in faith – and like the disciples question what all this could mean in our lives. Amen.