

Sunday reflection for Sunday the 27th February:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: Pisgah 27/2/2022

Luke 9:28-45

Jesus' disciples experienced some pretty incredible scenes,
...as they followed their master around for those 3 years.

MIND BLOWING moments aplenty.

We also read,
...that they were often left scratching their heads,
...at the MYSTERY of it all -

=but perhaps none more so than in today's text.

As I turn to today's transfiguration text >

...I can almost hear the incredibly deep voice,
..... of the BASS singer in Handel's Messiah intoning -

"Behold, I tell you a mystery...."

There's a **lot** of mystery in this text .

...= I'M SURE THE DISCIPLES WERE A BIT GOBSMACKED UP ON THAT MOUNTAIN TOP

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SOMETIMES a bit of mystery is good:

- What will I get for my birthday?
- or who DID IT in the book I'm reading?

**(I can live with *those mystery's***

**...= cause I'll find out the answer soon enough**

Not all mystery is so intriguingly fun however -

...OR SO QUICKLY ANSWERED

**In March,**

...I've been asked to speak at a small support group in Spittal,

.....for people who are living with GRIEF

I've been asked to go with my MINISTERS hat on,

...rather than the MENTAL HEALTH one,

And the theme:

***'The problem of pain'***

*(Or - the mystery of why a good God allows people to suffer)*

THAT'S a pretty big mystery -

and the uncomfortable part for me,

.....will be the mystery of sensitively finding the right words to say,

.....about the mystery of suffering,

.....to a group of people who ARE suffering

I haven't started the prep for that talk yet,

...BUT when I do,

= I'm pretty sure that, among other sources,

..... I'll be dipping into the book of Job

**Job was almost pulling his hair out,**

**.... in pain, frustration and confusion...**

MYSTERY and PAIN are dominant themes in Job -

...so it seems an excellent place to start,

.....and a rich place to mine,

= when preparing to talk about the MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

**But I hope the folks I meet at the group -**

**...won't be expecting definitive or simplistically neat answers -**

**Job teaches us a lot**

.....about FAITH and WISDOM

*(Job doggedly holding onto God in the middle of a crisis -*

*-Job learning that he doesn't have to face suffering alone or unaided*

= *but at the end of the book,*

..... *Job is still left with a lot of MYSTERY (as are we)*

In our *lectionary text* this Sunday -

**we encounter a different kind of mystery:**

**...mystery on the mountain top - TRANSFIGURATION**

**For a brief period of time we LITERALLY encounter -**

‘HEAVEN ON EARTH’

.... ‘a taste of THINGS TO COME’

AND after flooding his disciples with all this SUPERNATURAL MYSTERY -

Q - what did he say to them?

... he basically said - ‘*shhh, don’t tell anyone yet*’

(bafflement is bad enough -

...but being told to keep it under my hat would probably compound it for me )

And just to RAMP UP their ***confusion*** and ***sense of mystery*** -

...he says something even more baffling:

‘*Don’t tell anyone until I come back from the dead*’

(we know from our GOSPEL readings,

...that they didn’t have a clue what he was talking about here:

***‘Is he being metaphorical when he talks about coming back from the dead? -***

***...is he talking in obscure parabel like language?’***

We know that because:

***In vs 10 -***

they discussed among themselves,

...what this odd saying (*coming back from the dead*) could mean???

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When I last preached on this TRANSFIGURATION text,

...I took the approach of trying to decode some of the mystery -

.....make sense of the baffling,

.....I tapped the wisdom of those bible scholars,

..... who write at length about such things

The words/images etc....

I'm going for a DIFFERENT TACT this time

.. (and in keeping with Job theme)

...= I'm going to sit with the mystery.

The disciples who accompanied Jesus up to the mountain top, ...had to sit with mystery -

.....SO too shall we! (It'll help us to empathise!)

Like us

The DISCIPLES ***knew*** they had a loving GOD -

.....and yet they lived in world,

..... where they had more questions than answers (TRUST)

JOB ***knew*** he had a loving GOD -

.....and yet he lived in a world,

..... where there were more *perplexing questions* that *answers*

WE know that we have a loving GOD,

....and yet are faced with mystery everytime we open a newspaper (“why Lord? How long?”)

THEY CLUNG ON -

....WE CLING ON TOO.

Clinging on - IN THE CONFUSION

= seems to be a core requirement of discipleship

It's easy to forget,

....that the disciples spent a good part of their 3 YEARS with Jesus,

.....in a state of BEWILDERED PUZZLEMENT.

They must have spent a good proportion of their time,

....frowning and muttering ‘WHAAAAAAT’??

**now we've had tons of sermons and scholars,

...to unpack the meaning of Jesus' words for us over 1000's of years

BUT for them,

... some of the things JESUS said over *over 3 years*,

..... were **so new and mind blowing**,

= that they were left **open mouthed and baffled**

he shook their reality,

.... and elicited the WHHHAAT's and the puzzled frown lines

Here are a few of the sayings -

...which are familiar to us,

.....but were BRAND NEW and perplexing AT THE TIME >

They've just told him there isn't enough food to feed a multitude - he replies: "*You give them something to eat*"

(What part of '*there isn't enough food*' didn't Jesus understand?!)

"It is what comes out of a person that defiles" (they have had a lifetime of avoiding certain 'unclean' foods - he turns this on it's head)

"Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (reach the top by aiming for the bottom?)

"Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (ditto)

"Pray for your enemies"

"Give him your cloak, turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile"

AND AGAIN IN OUR TEXT TODAY after the transfiguration,

...the most bewildering statement of all:

"The son of man must die"

(and later he'll tell them...) *"deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me"*

This is a TINY selection

There's a dichotomy for the disciples >

THEM and US today -

....that this text highlights for me

We have a **loving God** > MIGHTY and WONDERFUL,

....and yet sometimes it feels like we are on **the losing side**

They have just seen JESUS (their friend) TRANSFIGURED -

...heaven is **around** him,

....God **speaks** for him,

.....Moses and Elijah **chat** to him

= HE IS GOD'S SON > HE IS THE MESSIAH (clarity at last!!!!!!)

And then he goes and spoils a beautiful moment -

....by suggesting > **that the son of man's going to die.**

Whhhhaaat?!

We've had lots of sermons explaining this for us -

...MILLENIA to get our heads around it,

WE have grown up with EASTER CHEERINESS -

...new life, HOORAY!!

....good **friday** is just a prelude to **Easter eggs** - YEAH!

But the concept of *VICTORY THROUGH DEATH*
.. (being PUT to death by your enemies no less)
....was entirely ALIEN to them.

They had no hindsight -
....**no historical *resurrection narratives* to draw upon**
....humiliation/death = FAILURE,
.....= BAD MEN HAVE WON
.....= GAME OVER

JESUS SAID HE WOULD RISE AGAIN -
...but they **didn't seem to digest** this fact properly

Perhaps as they dwelt on their friends imminent **death/humiliation** -
.....and the **obscene delight** of his murders,
.....they were blinded to the 'I'LL RISE AGAIN BIT'

Course you will Jesus - like the rest of us -
....**at some distant unimaginable END TIME point in the future**
BUT THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THE *IMMINENCE* OF HIS PREDICTION -

THOSE '*in 3 days he'll rise again*' words.
...were either lost to them,
.....or not taken literally enough.

God has always made promises to his followers -
The challenge of discipleship,
....*is clinging onto them,*
..... when our circumstances don't LOOK promising

- This was Job's challenge
- This was Peter, James and John's challenge in today's today text
- It's OUR challenge NOW

(especially when we open our newspapers and reflect on the suffering all around us)

It's the challenge in the face of our difficult questions:

"Why do you let it happen Lord?"

"LORD OF THE HARVEST: - in the wheat and the weeds story,
'you promised to pluck the pain and evil out at the right time' -
.....WHY ISN'T THAT TIME NOW?"

We've seen the transfiguration today:

A TASTER FOR HEAVEN ON EARTH -

....**LORD** - why don't you transfigure the **WHOLE** of creation NOW?

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Some people **WALK AWAY** -

....too **UNCOMFORTABLE** with the **MYSTERY**,

.....too **IRKED** with **GOD**

**It's the persistent disciples who CARRY ON**

...here's a good example of a **persistent** disciple,

..... who won't be put off: = ELISHA

You may not realise it,

...but there are TWO transfiguration texts in scripture -

Elisha appears in the OTHER **transfiguration text** in

2 KINGS 2:1-12

Elijah is about to RETIRE (*from both his ministry and this life*)

= it's like a weird kind of pre-funeral procession

...as he walks into the distance he is surrounded by prophets -

but they don't speak to him

(*it's as though they already think of him as dead*)

ELISHA is ELIJAH'S servant (or kind of apprentice)

Elijah keeps saying -

GO BACK ELISHA - WHY DON'T YOU JUST STAY BEHIND

...i'm only going to Bethel,

.....Jericho,

.....Jordan

perhaps he was being tested

(*'why don't you go off,*

..... *and look to your own concerns like everybody else'*)

.If he **had** given up early on -

....if he **had** stayed in Gilgal (as his master had first suggested)

= he wouldn't have seen the 1st transfiguration

READ

### **2 KINGS 2:11-13**

*"As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan."*

He had put aside family and EVERYTHING to follow Elijah -

...if he HAD given up and walked away,

...if he HADN'T have clung onto his FAITH TENACIOUSLY,

He wouldn't have glimpsed heaven

...he wouldn't have received the vision,

..... that was his GIFT for the rest of his life

(the GIFT that turned out to be,

..... CONFORMATION of his calling,

..... to be the next prophet after Elijah)

His SPRINGBOARD.

\*\*But he was **tested every step of the way,**

..... to that place as he followed his master

(why don't you turn back - AGAIN and AGAIN and AGAIN)

\*\*have you ever experienced,  
..... a similar voice in the back of your mind?  
(why follow Jesus - why don't you turn back?)

Conclusion:

JOB, the 3 Disciples in our text today, Elisha -

**All carry with them God's promises**

(Elisha and the disciples even have a visual glimpse of that promise)

*Their faith is tested as they walk on in a state of mystery*

(‘what's gonna happen next? --- why's it working this way?’)

Like Elisha on the coattails of Elijah -

= THEY ALL CARRY ON.

=YES - WRESTLING WITH THE MYSTERY

= BUT CLINGING TO THEIR PROMISE

I PRAT THAT YOU AND I CARRY ON,

...surrounded as we are by our *mystery and many questions*

.....clinging onto the **transfiguration promise**

**Which is the promise that;**

***“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven”***

....just as you said it will be done Lord,

AMEN