Head and Heart

**11th February 2024 Sunday before Lent**



**Readings**

2 Kings 2: 1 - 12

Psalm 50: 1 - 6

2 Corinthians 4: 3 – 6

Mark 9: 2- 9

**Heaven is So Close**

I cannot read today’s Old Testament lesson without hearing the accompaniment of the 19th century African American spiritual, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, and being grateful for the faith and personal experience which gives me assurance of heaven being as close to me as a speeding vehicle – though I do wonder about contemporary fiery chariots!

Continuing last week’s theme of the God-dimension being part of everyday life – less than a single breath away - this is the account of Elijah’s spiritual departure from three-dimensional living. He is passing on his authority and prophetic ministry to his disciple, Elisha. They are being observed by communities of other prophetic schools who share the often-prolonged wait for heaven’s special moments, calls and revelations. God has various works for Elijah to complete before his departure. They involve walking many miles from Gilgal, where God’s people first entered the Promised Land, to Bethel, to Jericho and finally to the Jordan river. Faithful Elisha will not let his master go alone and as a reward he receives Elijah’s *mission mantle –* enabling him to share and continue the prophet’s call - plus the promise he will witness his master’s departure. Picture language or fact, we may hear and see the windstorm, whipping up clouds of fiery red sand around the moving chariot. The transporting moment has come. Heaven is close enough to hear and touch and enable the inter-dimensional ride!

The two dimensions of heaven and earth come close in our gospel reading when Elijah appears once more to talk with Jesus on Mount Hermon. It happened just six days after Jesus had challenged his disciples to confirm who they really thought he was. Typically, Peter had spoken for them all as he blurted out, *‘You are the Christ!’* Jesus had gone on to speak about his imminent passion and death in Jerusalem. Now he is ready to make things clearer to them. He took Peter, James, and John up the slopes of Mount Hermon to a place between the tree line and snow line. While the three were probably taking in the view, in a single moment everything suddenly changed. Jesus was so different in appearance – shot through with radiant, reflecting light. He was with two unmistakeable characters from the scriptures – Moses and Elijah! They represent the former emphases on the Law and Prophets through whom God had spoken to his people. Even more wonderful and, no doubt, fearful, they heard a voice from heaven – *‘This is my dear Son. Listen to him!’*

Those poor disciples! All in such a brief time, heaven had come close like a fellside mist in autumn. It cleared as quickly as it had come and then everything was back to daily normal. It was just Jesus! Peter, for once struggling to speak, blurts out his muddled thoughts, as many others have done since. *‘Heaven is here! Let’s build!’* Despite Jesus’ teaching about the temple and its worship, Peter could have no idea about the pain and gospel-corruption which buildings and shrines would bring to his fellow disciples for all centuries to come! Perhaps that was why Jesus interrupted them. He asked them not to tell what they had seen that day until he was risen from death – until the closeness of heaven would be real and brought near through his presence everyday – every moment.

*‘Do you believe there is a heaven?’* It’s a common question in our present society. It was often heard too in first century Corinth. Apostle Paul speaks about the gospel – eternal life in Christ – being hidden from people around him. Surrounded by ‘religions’ they were not able personally to believe and link in to spiritual life. He explains that *the ‘god of this world’ –* the magnetic pull of here and now, is making them blind to the Good News. They cannot see the glory of Christ Jesus in the spoken message or in the Spirit’s loving touches all about them. To those who have faith the everyday passing moment – worrying, fearful or beautiful - can be a close link with heaven. Of course, the Hermon story continues as Jesus led his emerging church downhill to a world of human need, of pain, disease, and disorder. There too, in works of love – sometimes accompanied by miracles – they will feel part of the *God-dimension* experience and know for real that heaven is closer than close.

Prayer – based on Psalm 50:1-6



Lord, though you are Almighty God of power and glory,

you make yourself known to us in the simplest ways;

Often in praise, prayer, and worship;

sometimes in a personal word,

read or heard from the scriptures.

even in a mountaintop experience at sunrise or sunset

But best of all when family members and friends,

who are in heaven, come to us in a passing thought,

a favourite picture or familiar word … and you, with them, are closer than close.

Our hearts are glad, and we say *Thank you Lord.*

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