

14th February 2021 Sunday before Lent

Readings

2 Kings 2: 1 - 12

Psalm 50: 1 - 6

2 Corinthians 4: 3 - 6

Mark 9: 2 - 9



Let's talk about it!

How familiar the news bulletins have become with their cold statistics – *'another thousand deaths have been recorded within 28 days of testing for Covid19!'* Many of us react to this like the prophet Elisha in today's Old Testament reading. Elijah has revealed that the time has come for him to be translated to heaven. As he prepares they pass through the cities of Bethel and Jericho on the way to the river Jordan and Elisha insists on staying beside his ageing mentor. At each place they visit there are groups of prophets who are aware of Elijah's purpose and want to talk to Elisha about it. Every time they approach him Elisha says, *I don't want to talk about it!*

In recent media interviews I have noticed how reluctant people are to speak of death and dying and when the subject is addressed there doesn't seem to be a great deal of hope and assurance about what follows death except the personal pain for those who are the losers.

The Gospel reading today about the Transfiguration of Jesus follows him speaking of his impending death in Jerusalem. Peter has a similar approach to that of Elisha – *No! This can't happen to you, Lord. Let's not talk about it!* Jesus does not agree and says to Peter and his companions, *'Let's talk about it! Let's be real about it!'* The time had come when he needed to prepare his disciples for his impending death – and resurrection. He had approached the subject with them a week earlier but his men could not understand or accept what he was telling them – in fact Peter, as usual, had been outspoken – *'This could never happen to you! We've taken a while to get round to the idea of you being Son of God – What about all the work still to do? Surely the Father would never let that happen to you ...'* Peter is rebuked but that doesn't bring understanding. Now, six days after that Jesus takes his *'band of brothers'* for a retreat near Caesarea Philippi. Leaving most of them on the lower slopes of mount Hermon he climbs through trees to near the snow line with Peter, James and John. Suddenly, while they pray the three see Jesus changed – transfigured with light – the glory of God.

If it had been today I imagine at least one would have whipped out a mobile phone to get a picture! Overawed Peter however, takes a more contemporary approach. Recognising somehow the figures of Moses and Elijah in the ghostly glory-light he calls, *Lord let's erect shelters for all three of you!* It's a thought which has so often followed a deep spiritual or historic moment - *Let's build! - A shrine! - A memorial.* Again Peter is corrected, this time by what surely must be the voice of God - *This is my Son. Listen to him!*

Each of today's scriptures take us to what is often called the 'thin place' where heaven and earth merge and death is just a doorway. The apostle, Paul, speaks of how knowing Jesus opens our lives to experiences of the glory of God. However, as in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus we have to note what follows times in the *thin place*. Back down the mountain there's a suffering world needing the Lord's attention with the help of his disciples' prayers.

Living in the thin place - living in two worlds - *both sides of the doorway* - is at the heart of our Christian experience - worship and prayer, fellowship and conversation ... The moments when death and the grave are no longer a mystery. The place where we can begin to understand God's call and purpose for us; where we are called to to meet Jesus and peer into heaven.

If the pandemic has helped us to live in the thin place - we have hope, peace, comfort amidst glimpses of the glory-light of God in Jesus.

A Prayer

*Lord, our God, take us into the 'thin-place'
Where heaven is as real as earth;
Where we catch sight of your glory-light;
Where, in that light we see the pain of the world
Which calls us back - with Jesus.*

