

Sermon preached at SJB Alresford Transfiguration 2021

Luke:9: 28 Jesus took Peter and James and John

*Luke 9.28-36*

<sup>28</sup>Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' Peter did not know what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

What do you think is happening in this story? It sort of sticks up in the middle of Luke's Gospel, in much the same way that Mount Tabor sticks up from the Galilean Plain – like an upturned pudding bowl. They think that Mount Tabor may have been the mountain that Jesus went up with Peter, James and John. So, if you visit Israel that is what they take you up. You arrive at the bottom and all get into stretch limos. They will drive you up a narrow road to the top. You don't think there is room for two way traffic, especially as your driver keeps turning round to talk to you in the back at the same time as he is speaking on his mobile. The really amazing thing is that none of the limos has as much as a scratch on it. There is something surreal about it. But it is a story about the surreal – it is a moment of revelation. It is a time to make connections.

So I want you to imagine that you are standing in front of a painting of this event. And you are looking at all the parts of the picture trying to see what you can identify and what makes connections. What do I mean by connections? Well, who does Jesus take with him? Peter, James and John who were his kind of inner circle. Can you think of anywhere else he took those three? The Garden of Gethsamane for one. Those three link or connect this story with the coming suffering and death of Jesus. And the fact that Jesus has taken them up the mountain reminds us of Moses on Mount Sinai or the Sermon on the Mount: Holy times, time when we meet God, are often what we call "mountain top experiences".

And then there are Moses and Elijah whom Jesus speaks to on top of the mountain. When we get to the resurrection in Luke's Gospel we find that there are two men in dazzling white clothes in the tomb. They are not angels – they are Moses and Elijah. They represent the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Their being there tells us that what is happening in Jesus is a continuation of the Old Testament story, just as their being in the tomb on Easter Day tells us that Jesus has now taken over from them.

And Luke tells us something about the conversation that they are having with Jesus. They are speaking about the departure Jesus will make when they get to Jerusalem. We know about that departure, don't we? Jesus

keeps telling the disciples it will lead to his death when he goes to Jerusalem. But the interesting thing is that the word for departure that Luke uses is “Exodus” – the very word used for the coming out of slavery in Egypt for the people of Israel. The Exodus took them from slavery to freedom. Now the death or exodus of Jesus will take us all from slavery under sin to a new freedom. His death will lead to our life.

So, in this passage the glory of the moment (dazzling clothes) is held together with the cross (his exodus). It’s a warning to all of us that if we want to understand the glory of Jesus we have to realise that it only comes about because he is willing to die for us. That is the truth that is behind the scenes as Jesus goes about healing, teaching and so on. This is what is really going on.

So my final questions to you this morning are these:

What is really going on in our world today? Behind all the things we see and hear about, what is really happening? What is the big picture?

And, secondly, where would you go to see and understand? You may not manage a mountain, but where could you go?

The story of the Transfiguration is always a challenge. It is surreal.