

Let us pray: Dear Lord, May what is said and what is heard be only ever to your glory.
Amen

Today our Gospel reading takes us out of the everyday, day-in-day-outness of life and the over familiar ways we walk, up to the mountain top. And a respite from day in and day outness of life might feel especially relevant today, even if your morning was enhanced by the delivery of a dozen red roses.

From a mountain you can gain a new perspective. See things in proper proportion. See not only where you are going but where you have been. A mountain top feels very appealing indeed. Especially a warm one.

In spiritual terms mountain tops are often used as metaphor for being close to God. Where the temporal - the everyday - meets the eternal - the forever day. Places that hold these encounters are sometimes described as being where the line between heaven and earth is very thin. A glimpse through the veil. Sacred, holy, meeting places.

This is certainly the experience we seem to have here in our gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke all contain very similar accounts of this mountain top event, we call the Transfiguration. When three of the disciples see the appearance of Jesus as changed – transfigured.

The account Mark gives us describes the dazzling white of Jesus clothes as “whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them”. Mark is making clear that this is a beyond natural, human, experience. It is a “supernatural” experience. A way of seeing that is no trick of the light but a God-given revelation. A thin place, a glimpse for Peter, James and John beyond the veil.

This becomes clearer still when Mark describes the now dazzling Jesus speaking to Elijah and Moses. For the first hearers of this gospel account the message is easy to interpret. Elijah represents the prophets and Moses the Law. Jesus has come as the fulfilment of both the Law and the Prophets and the voice of God makes this ringingly clear – Jesus – is my beloved son. Listen now to him.

This mountain top experience has followed a roller coaster of activity for the disciples. There have been long and firing journeys. Much aggravation from the authorities trying to trip Jesus up, asking for signs. Crowds of hungry, needy, troubled people looking to Jesus to heal and help and hold them. And then Peter’s moment of true insight when he recognizes and names Jesus as the Christ.

And then the mountain. And the dazzling and the voice of God and Moses and Elijah.

We read about Elijah and his mountain top or rather whirlwind experience in our Old Testament reading today. Elijah is a key figure for the Jewish people of Jesus’s day. Elijah the great prophet of Israel does not die, but is taken up into heaven and the belief is that he will come again before the Messiah comes. Three times Elijah tries to dissuade his pupil Elisha from following him from where God is going to take him to

glory. Three times Elisha refuses to leave him and is rewarded by seeing Elijah taken up into heaven in chariot of fire and horses of fire. Elisha cries "Father, Father" but then when the fire and the whirlwind are over, Elisha is left alone.

There are lots of comparisons and parallels between this account and that of the transfiguration, but the one I want to draw our attention to today is this moment. The moment when the heavens that have opened close again. The moment when the glory that has surrounded us departs. The moment that comes whenever we climb a mountain – the coming down again.

So let us look at what Mark tells us at the end of this mountain top experience. God's voice heard so clearly is heard no longer. Moses and Elijah do not stay, for all Peter would like them to with his offer to build little houses for them. But unlike Elisha left alone we have this verse: Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. My goodness "only Jesus". Only what they had all along. Only everything.

The continuum of Jesus is his life as God's son. The Word with God from the beginning as St John's Gospel has it. The extraordinary – eyes on stalks -thing about Jesus is not his dazzling, his divinity, but his flesh and blood, sad and tired, laughing and loving humanity. Again as John has it, the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us.

It is not on the mountain top that the disciples are any closer to God. It is in the traipsing around Galilee, in the day in day outness that the incarnation is lived and shared. In the scrappy little towns, the desperate poor and sick and frightened, in the conversations, the meals, the laughter and the pain, that is where the disciples were most truly accompanied. Where we are most truly accompanied this side of heaven.

There is nothing wrong with climbing mountains - physically or spiritually. And it is human to be like Peter and to want things to last. But to yearn for those moments is to miss the real wonder of it all. God is with us not to dazzle us on the mountain – though of course he can and does and glory be to him for those glimpses – but God is with us take us by the hand in the daily slog of our normal highways and byways. Transfiguring us and them as travellers and roads to glory.

We are all at different places on our roads and have had different glimpses, but this Lent I recommend to those two short but cosmos-shaking words "Only Jesus" as food for prayer and a stimulus to growth. To look at our days in and days out and to see how we recognize and name Christ in them. To look at all the ordinariness – the enforced ordinariness of our days and see the difference "only Jesus" can make. **Amen**