

Sermon for Sunday next before Lent 3rd March 2019

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“Asking questions”. Anyone who has had or has young children will conclude that humans are “hard-wired”, as the new cliché goes, to ask questions. Rather a lot of them start with the word, “WHY?” Rather a lot of them quickly exhaust our knowledge or patience or both. But in recent news stories from what prompted young women to become ISIS brides, to what has been happening in abuse cases involving the church or other trusted institutions there has been the question; “Why did no one ask any questions?”

Asking questions. Jesus both asked his followers a lot of questions and encouraged them to seek for the answer. People also asked a lot of questions about Jesus. Some like Herod’s questioning of the wise men were about self-preservation. Some like the Jewish authorities were about protecting the status quo. They echo in this the issues of our institutions in our time: protecting what should be questioned. But the question most people asked most of the time was, “Who is this Jesus?” closely followed by, “And how does he do the things he does?” These things the things Jesus did in the context of our gospel passage provoked a great rush of such questioning.

In the days before the events of our reading Jesus has healed a woman with a haemorrhage, woken the daughter of a Jewish official, from seeming death, and has fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish. No wonder the crowds followed him. No wonder there was the buzz of excited questions: Who is he? Is he John the Baptist returned to us? Is he the prophet Elijah. Is he another Moses feeding us with bread from heaven?

Ten verses before our Gospel Jesus has asked his disciples if they agree with the crowds that he is the risen John the Baptist or the returned prophet Elijah. “Who” he asks them “do you say that I am?” And Peter replies “The Messiah”. The Christ.

But Peter like many of us here today, myself included, can give this answer without always fully taking in all this answer holds. Luke’s account of what happened when Jesus took Peter, James and John away from the crowds explores this. For main event in passage we heard from Luke’s Gospel this morning is most often described as the Transfiguration. Up on the mountain the disciples witness the glory of God shining in patriarch, Moses and prophet, Elijah and on their friend and teacher, Jesus. It is not a surprise that Peter misreads the situation and offers to build three shelters for them. But as he tries to pin down in human terms the glimpse he has been given of glory of God the cloud descends and their sight fails.

But the voice of God is heard answering the question in its fullest form. Who is Jesus? “THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN; LISTEN TO HIM.”

My Son, my Chosen. The answer to the question of who he is and how he does the things he does. And because of this: Listen to him. The answer to that other question. What other question? The unspoken question in the hearts of every hungry person in the crowd that day Jesus blessed and shared bread and fish. The question in the hearts of everyone with a condition no one could cure, in the hearts of every parent with a sick or troubled child. Yes, they would ask aloud, "Who is Jesus? And how is he doing this?" But deep inside was that other question. The one they hardly dared hope to form: "And can he do the things he does for me?". Can he heal, feed and forgive me? Can he heal, feed and restore the one I love?"

Jesus knows the deepest questions and yearnings of the human heart. He had a human heart and knew its ways. But because of who he is he has the power to answer that unspoken question too. "Can he do it for me?"

It is no accident of storytelling or happenstance that in Luke's account Jesus and his disciples descend from the light and glory of the mount of the transfiguration to the darkness and despair of the human condition and its deepest needs.

For we heard today the voices of two Fathers. God the Father identifying Jesus as his only begotten Son. And from the crowd a desperate father crying out in pain beyond most of our imaginings "Teacher I beg you to look at my Son; he is my only child." The child, described here as possessed by a demon is, whatever the cause, deeply distressed and damaged by his condition. Convulsions, shrieking, mauling, the language is vivid and disturbing to read let alone witness, let alone witness happening to someone you love.

Look at my son says this Father. Listen to my Son says God the Father.

Luke's words for what happens next are simple. "But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father*. Truly transfigured –answered– lives.

In all the questions of our lives. From our helplessness in the face of the worries and trouble of the world – the why did no one ask situations. The questions about what healing truly is do not go away but the answer in all the broken places in our lives is to listen to him. In our secret hidden desperate hope for healed lives and relationships we can hold on to Jesus words. To listen to him. To trust in him. To know who is to know why, for Jesus is the Son of the Living God, he has the power to forgive, heal and restore. And yes, he can do the same for you and for me. Amen

**For another time have a look at the whole of Luke 9 as there are some wonderful connections to be drawn between these two father/son relationships. Luke is drawing attention to what God the Father will suffer in seeing Jesus suffer in the crucifixion, until he too is restored to His Father.*