

Readings and Sermons for the Sunday Before Lent

19th Feb 2012

Readings

2 Kings 2.1-12

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?' And he said, 'Yes, I know; keep silent.' Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?' And he answered, 'Yes, I know; be silent.' Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

2 Corinthians 4.3-6

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9.2-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Rev'd Canon Simon Moor – Sunday Eucharist

For nearly 15 years up until her death in 1990 my grandma lived with us. I can just see her now – sat in her seat – a tight grip on my hand. “What day is it?” she would ask and whatever the following conversation ensued, that question “What day is it?” would rear its head every thirty seconds or so; that and request for another cup of tea. And yet grandma could remember events from her childhood before the First World War.

I was reminded of this image during the last Wednesday Eucharist. We read from the Epistle of St James where he questions the reader, “Are you a doer of the Word?” He is challenging the Christian to be active and responsive in their faith. He encourages us to be informed by what we know, learn and experience through faith’s gaze on the world.

The alternative to James – is forgetting what we look like when we turn away from a mirror. This is forgetfulness on a much more serious scale than that experienced by my grandma in her advanced years. Having such guidance and grace and yet forgetting to act or just turning our backs on such beauty of living that Jesus offers to those who follow him.

This tension should not surprise us, though it may be sadness to God’s heart. Such ignorance or rejection of God is something that litters the scriptures. It seems almost to be hard wired into human nature. Perhaps we need to pray the words in the account which come after the Transfiguration when the man says to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief!”

Is it human nature to resist James’ call - “Are you a doer of the Word?”

I’m always amazed at the Old Testament – filled with God encounters – which seem to have little impact on attitudes or actions of the chosen and blessed people of Israel. Even when spoken to directly, the Old Testament characters seem not only to forget their own reflection, but they forget that it was God who spoke and God who had directed them.

Here I struggle with the disciples. They saw Jesus, touched Jesus, listened to him, witness his actions. The disciple stood at the transfiguration of this morning’s Gospel and heard those words – “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” -They then fell away when it really counted.

Preparing for Lent, Holy Week and Easter I came across a marvellous Youtube clip that illustrates this. On the Huddersfield Parish church Web site – the tab marked Media - you can see the gathering of followers and then the falling away of not just Jesus’ disciples but all shade of follower as Good Friday approached. Even though they knew who Jesus was at the centre of their being. Even though they knew who Jesus was at the centre of their being.

So how can we be different? How can we be “Doers of the Word?”

Being learners of the word helps us to be “Doers of the Word”

How about spending time in reading, seeing Christ in the Newspaper or in a storyline of soap; by reading a little scripture and asking how it may affect my living this week. Making some sort of

litmus test of what we learn. Or how about coming to this Lenten study on 'Hospitaliy' – 'Be my Guest' is the tag line of the study. Learn a little and be a "Doer of the Word?"

Being listeners of the word helps us to be "Doers of the Word".

Hear of Jesus as we progress through Lent and Holy Week.

A long standing friend of mine doesn't 'do' Lent, Holy Week and Easter – because they say it is too sad. But by listening afresh to the trials, death and resurrection of Jesus help us to remember the experience he went through. Only through working through Jesus life and ministry; his awful end, can truly help us into an informed response.

Easter doesn't just happen and indeed it only has the impact to help us become 'doers' of the faith when prefigured by events this side of the season. The Easter of cards and bunnies and eggs is an insipid shadow, a forgetful mirror image, a "What day is it?" sort of question compared to the joyous Easter when highlighted by the events of Lent and Holy Week. Let being listeners of the word help you to be "Doers of the Word".

In other words – draw closer, recognise more this coming season – you will see the opportunities unfolding as Lent progresses. No doubt we would still fall away as any Old Testament character or New Testament Disciple. Yet by drawing closer, recognising more will give contact and may make our failures more poignant.

But by drawing closer, recognising the loneliness and loss which Jesus incurred, the depths of our weakness become more clear and the Resurrection more powerful and joyful.

And call us to be 'Doers of the Faith' – forgiven and empowered to turn again.