

Who he ?

7 2 16

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross;
give us the grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory.

My text may be found in today's gospel, in Luke chapter 9 and verse 29:

'And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed,
and his clothes became dazzlingly white.'

August 6th – the day they dropped the first Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima. August 6th – the day we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ. But today, seven months early, on 7th February, on the Sunday next before Lent, Quinquagesima, we also have the chance to hear Luke's account of Jesus' transfiguration on Mount Hermon in the presence of Peter, James and John and in the company of Moses and Elijah.

So my question for us today is why ? Why does the Common Lectionary have two occasions in the year when we can mark the transfiguration of Christ ? And the answer in part lies in time. For today, Sunday is the Sunday nearest to Ash Wednesday, the moment we start our Lenten discipline for six weeks, for forty

odd days; forty-six if you want to include the Sundays, preparing though a period of spiritual discipline to remember the events of Holy Week and Easter: the arrest, the trial and the execution of our Lord and his resurrection on the morning of the third day. And, before we do so, it is useful to bear in mind who and what Jesus Christ is: namely, the Son of God, our Saviour. The Transfiguration is a moment of epiphany for Peter, James and John, a moment when they are privileged to see something of the true appearance of Jesus. Jesus' face is transformed just as the face of Moses was transformed by his God-encounter on Mount Sinai. I guess that the face of Jesus is aglow with light, aglow with a radiance, a spiritual brightness, that makes Jesus look spiritually beautiful, handsome beyond words. And it's not only his face but his clothes that are transformed: Jesus, the light of the world, is now, at this moment in time, dressed in dazzlingly bright, white raiment.

So what has gone before and what follows this epiphany when the three are privileged to see Jesus as he really is ?

Some eight days before the Transfiguration, Jesus asks his disciples who people think he is and then he asks them who they think he is and Peter blurts out that he is the Messiah the Son of God. And after this cross-roads moment, when Jesus' colours are now clearly firmly nailed to the mast, and the consequences of what that will involve when they reach Jerusalem for Passover, just three of the twelve – Peter, James and John – are invited by Jesus to climb up the mountain with him to be on their own to pray.

The other nine are left down below for downtime and I wonder what they were thinking being left behind. In my imagined 'Bartholomew's Gospel', our Nathaniel isn't well pleased at not being invited up the mountain and then, of course, there is the pressure of dealing with the people who have flocked there to see Jesus and who isn't there for them to see, among whom is the distraught father of an epileptic boy who's in danger of self-harm when he is fitting. Bartholomew and the other eight can't cure the boy and the dad is understandably well annoyed given his new found faith in Jesus. So when Jesus does appear with the three, it is he, Jesus, not the nine, who fulfils the father's faith in him by exorcising his son of the demon that possesses the boy and thereby giving further evidence of why he is special.

So today we are standing once again on the brink of our Lenten journey towards Easter. Six weeks is a long time so it is good before we start to be encouraged by this epiphany of Jesus as he truly is: the Son of God, the beloved, to whom we should listen.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 33 : Who he

