

Sunday 12th August – Trinity 11 – Proper 14 (B)

1 Kings 19 4-8, Eph 4.25 to 5.2, John 6 v 35, 41 - 51

On Monday of this past week the 6th of August, the Church marked the Feast of the Transfiguration. The Gospel set for that day reminds us of the time when Jesus ascended the Mountain, by popular tradition Mount Tabor, although not specifically named, with the three favoured disciples, Peter, James and John. And there on that mountain top the cloud descended vpon the gathered company, and the disciples heard God speaking to them saying – *‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’*

Having slaughtered the prophets of Baal, Elijah was now running away from Jezebel who had threatened to kill him – ‘So may the Gods do to me, and more also if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow’ says Jezebel.

Having arrived at his destination in the continuation of Elijah’s story, God speaks to Elijah not in the

wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in the sound of silence.

In 1965 – Simon and Garfunkel recorded the song which some here will remember - ‘The Sound of Silence’ One verse of that song has these words – ‘And the people bowed and prayed, to the neon God they made, and the sign flashed out its warning, in the words that it was forming, and the sign said ‘The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls, and whispered in the sounds of silence’, and a further verse includes the words - ‘the vision that was planted in my brain still remains within the sound of silence.’

There may well be those, who like Elijah and Samuel, have heard God speaking to them - perhaps it was in silence, since Eli did not appear to hear God speak to Samuel, we do not know.

Today the ‘Christian Church’ believes that it knows the mind of Christ, but on many issues, there will be a diversity of views. Both sides in a situation facing the

church, will believe that it knows the mind of Jesus. All will claim to have ‘listened to’ and heard Jesus speaking to them. But they seem to have received different messages.

And is it any wonder, since we find on one hand those who believe implicitly in the word of God as revealed in Holy Scripture, whereas others, perhaps with a more liberal view of the bible, will have received and proclaim a different interpretation of those same words.

All involved will have claimed to have ‘listened’ to God, and yet heard different messages.

A one-time Primate of Nigeria, Archbishop Peter Akinola, was quoted as saying the following in response to various controversial situations within the Anglican Communion some years ago -

‘As things stand, a clear choice has been made for a Church that exists primarily in allegiance to the unbiblical departures and waywardness of our generation, a church that enthrones the will of men,

over and above the authority of God and his revealed and written word.'

I sometimes wonder why God does not make the message clearer, so that there can be no doubt as to what is and what is not acceptable?

However, in our second reading today from Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus, there is perhaps a timely reminder, of how the church it seems, has always had the problem of consensus.

'So then' says Paul 'putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members one of another.' 'Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.' (5.1).

Graham Tomlin in his commentary on our second reading says – 'Christian behaviour isn't simply a list of things you do not do' (Such as can be said of some of the 10 Commandments), for we are called to positive action, not negative abstinence. We should be assisting ourselves and encouraging others to a way of life which is reflective of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That might be challenging and even on occasions controversial.

But even Jesus found himself the centre of controversy on various occasions, but it did not deter him from preaching the Gospel he came to proclaim. The reason being, that the Jews judged him on human grounds and in so doing, rejected him.

And in rejecting him, rejected for themselves eternal life.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus proclaims himself to be the ‘Bread of Life’ following his feeding of the multitude with five barley loaves and two fish.

That certainly did not go down well with the Jews.

‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph’.

But Jesus response to us here today is very encouraging – ‘Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.’

So, as we are drawn by our Heavenly Father to his son – Jesus, so Jesus promise to us here today and to

all who will follow in his ways is that – ‘Jesus will raise that person up on the last day.’

What then were the grounds on which this rejection took place.

- 1 Firstly they rejected him on human grounds. Jesus was the son of a carpenter, they knew him and had seen him grow up in Nazareth. How could the ‘son’ of a tradesman from a poor home, be a special messenger from God? Human assessment, social values and worldly standards – ruled Jesus out.
- 2 Secondly, the Jews argued amongst themselves. They did not think to take it to God. In fact, they were not interested in what he thought it would seem! They were very keen to let others know what they thought, but not it appears in the least anxious to hear God’s opinion.
- 3 The Jews listened but they did not learn.

I am not always a good listener. I do not always hear what people are saying. One of the problems may be that my listening is of criticism or resentment. It might be that on other occasions my listening is of superiority – ‘I know what I am talking about’ listening. Or it could be that my listening is of indifference, I really couldn’t care what you are saying – or, I am listening only because I can’t get a word in. We need to listen in such a way that we can learn.

- 4 The Jews resisted the ‘drawing’ of God. Only those who accept Jesus, are drawn by God to Jesus. This ‘drawing’ has behind its meaning the feeling of resistance. As when the fishermen would try and haul a net full of fish to the shore. It has the same meaning as when Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates in Philippi as we read in Acts 16.

It is the same meaning as when a sword is drawn from its' scabbard.

God can and does draw people, but resistance can defeat even the pull of God.

Jesus in this the first of what has been called the seven parables of our Lord's person, relating to the 'I am' sayings, seeks to make clear that what he is offering to the people is both the 'living bread' and the bread which 'gives life'.

The bread, which the Jews received during the Exodus, could only sustain life temporarily. For all who ate of it, eventually died. The bread did not last overnight except for the Sabbath.

But all who come to Jesus, and hear and receive his word, will never hunger.

Remember the words of Jesus from Matthews's Gospel. Words which are regularly used in the 1662 HC Service here on the 1st Sunday of each month, and known as the 'comfortable' words.

‘Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden,
and I will refresh you.’

*(It is only when we are prepared to accept this
invitation, that we will know whether the promise is
fulfilled in our own lives.*

*God, through the power of his Holy Spirit initiates
from us the response to the invitation. Our acceptance
of that invitation, results in Jesus saying today to
each one of us – ‘I will raise you up on the last day.’
Coming to Jesus who said that I am the bread of life,
means that we will never go hungry, for we will take
into ourselves and receive from the one who is, the
‘bread of life.’ Not only will we never hunger, but,
those who believe in Jesus shall also never thirst.*

Some years ago I heard the following story -

*(A Daoist Monk out walking found himself lost. And
after a considerable time, without water and badly
dehydrated eventually came to a dwelling where a
woman was in residence. The woman, seeing the
monk’s condition, quickly fetched a bowl of water, but*

before giving it to the monk, she took a handful of dust and scattered it onto the water, before giving it to him. The monk, silently cursing the woman for this action, began to drink slowly from the bowl, as he had to blow away the dust before each mouthful. Eventually, having drained the bowl, and refreshed by the water, he went on his way.

Twenty years later, the monk passed by the same way. Again, the same woman offered him the water but first scattered dust onto the water before handing it to the monk. Remembering how the woman had carried out this procedure on that first visit, some twenty years previously, the monk asked her why she had put the dust onto the water. She replied –

‘If I had given you the water on its own, you would have drunk all the water in one go. And because of your dehydrated condition, there was the risk that you would have died!’)

The monk, could have rejected the water as offered to him by the woman, and in so doing that rejection might have cost him his life.

He was offered not only resurrection but also life.)

When the Samaritan Woman came to draw water from the well, Jesus said to her -

‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’

Jesus, whom we also proclaim to be the ‘living’ word, has spoken. To those who hear his word and keep it, he is also the resurrection and the life.

As God said to those three disciples, Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration –
‘Listen to Him.’