

Last Sunday after Epiphany 22/2/09

2Ki 2:1-12;

Ps 50: 106

2 Cor. 4:3-12

Mk 9:2-9

There is something about the readings for today that remind me of the rather kitsch statues one can buy in certain places where Jesus glows in the dark. This is the Jesus who is on top of things, and very easy to see that Yes, he is the Son of God. All the themes of Epiphany have been about the various ways that God revealed God's self in Jesus, for example the story of the Magi bringing gifts after being led to him by a star, the baptism of Jesus with the heavens opening up and a voice proclaiming him, and the turning of the water to wine at the wedding. And here now we have a story about how Jesus himself is transfigured before the inner group of the disciples and his clothes became "dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mk.9: 3).

One of the cards I received this Christmas was handmade, and it had two texts inside. On one side it had written "...the light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it", from St John's Prologue, and on the other side was written "If one does not stand in the darkness they will not be able to see the light."¹ And we have the juxtaposition of the Transfiguration of Jesus this Sunday, and Ash Wednesday in three days time. And before this event and again much later in this chapter Mark describes Jesus telling the disciples about his upcoming suffering and death. It seems that we can only be on the mountain of transfiguration for a short time, and then we have to come back down again, to face the reality of what it means to be human – albeit in light of what we have just seen on the mount.

In my work in the hospital, I often come across Christians who believe that the promises of Christ include one of being healed of illness. And many times that happens, and I can tell you I see many miracles over there, almost on a daily basis. But I don't believe that we are promised anywhere that we will be spared the ordinary human lot of suffering in its

¹ The Dialogue of the Saviour 133 verse 16

many forms of illness. We are human, and suffering is part of the package it seems. And was for Jesus too!

So if that is the case, what does it mean for us when we read about the Transfiguration of Jesus, or about his Resurrection? Is that just about Jesus, because he is the Son of God, but doesn't actually have anything to say to us ordinary people?

I don't believe so. The whole point of Jesus taking on our humanity was both to reveal to us something of the nature of God, so we could better understand something of who God is, and also to save us, or heal us. Jesus came on earth to make a difference.

In his book of spiritual reflections on a series of icons, Archbishop Rowan Williams writes about the icon of the Transfiguration, and he says:

And what is true about Jesus is – if we really encounter it in its fullness – shocking, devastating: that this human life is sustained from the depths of God without interruption and without obstacle, that it translates into human terms what and who God the Son eternally is. The shock comes from realising this means that God's life is compatible with every bit of human life, including the inner terrors of Gethsemane (fear and doubt) and the outer terrors of Calvary (torment and death).²

"God's life is compatible with every bit of human life". "And remember, I am with you always..." (Mt 28:20). And I think that is the message of God in Jesus, not that God will wave a magic wand and take all our suffering away, and make it all better. We are not kids where God can say "Mummy kiss it better". We are adults, whose lot is to cop some of the fall out, the consequences of our sinfulness or pure human failure in the pain of failed relationships, for example. But also in illness and death. Some of this illness is about our bodies just getting older and wearing out, and some of it is just totally inexplicable to us at present. But we know that God is with us in all of our suffering, in it to bring new life. Which isn't the same as making it all better or healing necessarily. Some of the most beautiful expressions of new life I have seen in my ministry in the hospital, have been related to the acceptance of dying and the giving of themselves to God in that process of dying. Trusting in God, that whatever befalls us in life, his faithful love is there with us.

² Rowan Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light*, John Garratt Publishing: Melbourne, 2003. 12

This can be really hard for us to do. We love to have reasons and understand what is behind things, and sometimes things and life are just beyond us to understand. But if our love for God is reflective at all of God's love for us, we will not doubt that love in the tough times, but will trust that a God who loved us so much that God was prepared to take on being human and live amongst us and suffer and die for us, is not going to walk away from us at the very time when we need him to be there with us.

In the Epistle we heard read: "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. But we have this treasure in clay jars..." (2 Cor. 4:6-7). The treasure of God's light shining in our hearts is indeed in clay jars, but that doesn't diminish the reality of the treasure of God's light who gives us knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Today we celebrate the face of Jesus Christ being transfigured, and in six and a half weeks we will celebrate the face of Jesus on the cross. Both faces are with us in our journey of life, and both bring us to appreciate the "God with us", Emmanuel.

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