

Transfiguration Sunday

February 15th, 2015

Unlike us the disciples did not grow up on a diet of New Testament teaching in Sunday School, nor did they sing songs like, ‘*Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so.*’ The disciples were schooled in the Jewish tradition and they were familiar with the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish Bible is organised quite differently from our Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible as it is called consists of three sections: the Law – otherwise known as the first 5 Books of Moses; the next section is the Prophets; and the third section is the Wisdom Writings (like Psalms, Proverbs and history).

To them Moses was the godly one, the one who spoke with God, the one who saw God, and the one who reflected the glory of God. Moses revealed God to the Hebrews, not as *one of the gods*, but as ‘I AM – God the Almighty’. Moses was a great leader who led the people through the desert to the Promised Land. He was more more than just a teacher; Moses journeyed with the people in their faith and in their lives.

Moses was awesome and is forever remembered in the sacred Passover meal where his story as God’s servant is recounted. Every Jewish child from then to this day (including Jesus) was instructed in the Passover. This meal reminded them of God’s presence with them in Egypt when they were slaves, reminded them of God’s angel of passover, and reminded them of God’s presence among them. It’s hard to play down the life of Moses because his role was, and still is gigantic in the life of the Hebrews.

In the light of Moses can you see how the disciples and all other Jews might struggle with the new teaching of *what’s his name...* Jesus of Nazareth? They struggled between the teachings of Moses which they *had* learned from youth and what Jesus now taught them. For the disciples it was all about Moses, the great lawgiver, God’s great leader, and the father of their faith.

For us it’s all about Jesus, and rightly so. But the disciples had no New Testament stories. They followed the Law of Moses with all their heart and soul. Try to imagine the inner faith

struggle they had with what they had learned and with Jesus' new teaching... "You have heard it said... but I now say unto you..."

Elijah was one of the great prophets – the greatest. He was a Godly hero to the Hebrew people. God's presence with Elijah was renowned, and the miracles he performed were as spectacular as they were unbelievable. He called upon God, who appeared as a fearful consuming fire among the pagan worshippers. Elijah revealed God's mighty presence among his chosen people. Elijah was a saviour type character. At times he felt alone in his mission but was upheld by God. The Hebrews prided themselves on the ministry of Elijah – and of course Elijah did not die but was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire.

Elijah, along with Moses was the disciples' earliest religious instruction and these two encapsulated their Hebrew faith. Moses and Elijah were the basis upon which the disciples and every Hebrew child had built their faith.

What could ever have led the disciples to redefine and realign their faith - *away from Moses and Elijah* - to Jesus?

The Transfiguration tells of the disciples at a crossroads: a great crossroads in faith. How will they tell of their conversion to Jesus?

Imagine the scene then when these great historic and faith characters (Moses and Elijah) appear before Peter, James and John. Here are the '*Fathers of their Faith*,' those whose life and teachings were embedded in their hearts, whose life and words they had poured over from infancy. While the disciples were trying to follow Jesus, how can Jesus ever measure up to the likes of Moses and Elijah?

At some point along the way as these disciples follow Jesus something happens. These devout Jews came to realise something. They see it but they can hardly believe it... The Transfiguration as it is called tells of their moment or realisation, and they share with us what it was like.

How could they share what it was like so that their fellow Jews and us might understand? They could do it in a picture. They give us a picture, an image of what it was like. A picture paints a thousand words: and what a glorious picture or image they offer us.

What dawned upon them was the same thing that dawned upon us. After much listening and watching and reflecting you see him, and with the other disciple Thomas you say in stunned amazement “my Lord and my God.” It can take years but then it boils down to that moment, and in that moment **who is it that is transfigured?**

At some point along the way as they journeyed with Jesus it dawned upon them: his unconditional love for all, his life of compassion, his serving and giving and everything without favouritism or boundary or limit; his willingness to give himself utterly, his love even on a cross, his love was God’s love!

As they reflected upon Jesus of Nazareth they realised that this was how they saw him. This was their image of Jesus. We would be unlikely to have an image of Jesus like this because this we don’t relate to Moses and Elijah the way they did. But to them to see Jesus in this way was utterly monumental. That Jesus eclipses Moses and Elijah would have these disciples on their knees and uttering, “O my God.” It was a fearful confession.

How can they ever return to their former faith position in the light of their experience of Jesus, but how can they move on?

They realise that they can no longer see Moses and Elijah the way they once had... “This is my beloved Son listen to him”. The disciples never heard this, this was a truth that dawned upon them, but by the way they tell us this means that it was a fearful realisation – loud, bold and fearful in their head and hearts. Having realised this, there was no way back for them, but what was the way forward?

It’s hard for anyone to move forward in faith. The traditions of the past mean so much to all of us. Our past traditions have been our mainstay, our comfort, and our source of joy. But it was *in the journey* that Moses was proved to be the great leader: it wasn’t as they stayed in Egypt that the waters opened up for them – *it was as they journeyed*.

It was only *as they moved forward* that they ate manna.

It was only as they journeyed that God was encountered on Mount Sinai.

It was only after they had journeyed and reached the Promised Land that they had a faith story to tell.

The traditions of your past will always be more appealing and alluring than walking in faith. The safety, security, and even *familiarity of slavery in Egypt* can at times be more appealing than the dangers of faith in action – journeying through the desert, hungry during the day and fearful at night. In their journey with Jesus the disciples did think about returning to their past lives, returning to the way things were, to the comfort of their old faith. The disciples tell us what they had to leave behind, what do you have to leave behind?

What is it that are you tempted to go back to? The transfiguration means there is no going back.

If you have seen in Jesus God's *love* you can't go back to old style judgement;
if you have seen God's undeserved *grace* in Jesus you can't settle for law;
and if you have seen God's *peace* in Jesus you can't settle for the peace this world offers.
You have been transfigured. The only way forward now is forward... *some people's way forward is to go back!* No turning back... no turning back!

The disciples have shared with us *their vision* of Jesus, as they saw him, as he was to them according to their time, custom and traditions. What is your transfigured image of Jesus, how do you see him, who is Jesus to you?