

Second Sunday of Lent

The jigsaw puzzle that I took out of its box on Christmas Day has only just been packed away again. After I had completed it, I found it hard to put it away because it was such a beautiful painting by Vincent Van Gough. He saw the night sky in a way that few others had ever imagined it.

Every artist draws our attention to the things that they themselves have found meaningful. It is good to think of the gospel writers as artists who paint different portraits of Jesus. Each of the writers tells the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Today we listen for the particular way that Luke tells his story. The context is important. Jesus has just begun his long journey towards Jerusalem, a journey to the cross during which he teaches his followers about discipleship. Eight days before today's episode he predicted that he would suffer and die. He challenges his disciples not to be ashamed of him, but to wait for the moment when his glory would be revealed. He also promises that some of those around him would not die before they saw the kingdom of God.

In Luke gospel Jesus goes up a high mount to pray and he takes Peter James and John with him to share in that time of prayer. As we go up the mountain with them, we try and listen for what Jesus might be revealing about himself there. It becomes obvious that prayer is so

central to his life. He seeks out those times when he can be totally attentive to his Father. We might be asking ourselves how important prayer is for us.

It was while he was praying that the aspect of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzlingly white. Moses and Elijah joined him. These two great prophets of the Old Testament talk with Jesus about his exodus or his passing from this world which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Luke is the only Gospel writer who tells us what they spoke about. When he uses the word exodus, he surely wants us to associate Jesus with Moses. He wants us to think of Jesus as a prophet like Moses that God raises up to bring his people out of the slavery of sin into the freedom of new life with Jesus.

Luke then draws our attention to the three disciples who were struggling to keep awake. It seems that they miss the conversation that has taken place, but they are awake enough to see something of the glory of Jesus and his two companions. Just as Moses and Elijah begin to leave them Peter, in an attempt to keep them there and hold on to this experience suggests that they build a tent for each of them. In hindsight he would have understood that it was a silly idea. None of us can put God in a box. And when he knew a bit more theology, he would have understood that having three tents would have made the other two prophets equal to Jesus.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of the story happens next. They were enveloped in a cloud. It was like the cloud that surrounded the people of Israel to keep them safe from the Egyptians. It was like the cloud that Moses entered into on Mount Sinai when he spoke with God face to face. And it was from that cloud that they heard the voice of God the Father saying to them, “This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.” Here was God anointing Jesus again as the prophet that he has chosen to reveal the depth of his love for his people. The Father is saying to each one of us, here is my son, here is my prophet, here is the one who longs to speak to you of my great love for you. Listen to him.

Jesus has a special word for each of us as we journey through Lent. Many of the Scripture readings chosen for us take us back to the origins of our faith. In our reading today from the Book of Genesis we hear of the Covenant that God made with Abram and the promise God made to give to his descendants the land that he was entering. God promises that he will protect Abraham. But there was nothing to see except a firebrand passing between two halves of the animals sacrificed to God. All Abraham can do is accept God’s word and be open to the love that God promises.

You and I are children of Abraham. We call him our father in faith. The faith that we have been given allows us to put our trust in God as Abraham did. There are many times when we cannot see what God is doing in our lives and in our world. There are many times when we cry out to God for help and God doesn’t seem to hear us. We have prayed for peace in Ukraine, but the war goes on. We have to look hard to see where God is in the midst of the desolation there. But God is there in every act of kindness that the people are showing towards one another. God is there at the Polish border where refugees are being made welcome. God is there in the hearts of those who are outraged at the injustice and the madness of this war and are doing all that they can to support those who are suffering.

May we listen for the words of hope and mercy that Jesus may wish to speak to us this week.