

2 Kings 2:1-12

Mark 9:2-9

The Transfiguration

2. Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus,

3. and his clothes became shining white---whiter than anyone in the world could wash them.

4. Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus.

5. Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, *Teacher, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.*

6. He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.

7. Then a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, *This is my own dear Son---listen to him!*

8. They took a quick look around but did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them.

9. As they came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, *Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from death.*

So I read the two passages set for this morning and then I put the kettle on. Mind still in blank mode (I think it was shock) I read them again and took the puppy for a walk.

How on earth do you preach on two extraordinary happenings (that weren't even your own experience) and make them understandable, pertinent to everyday life, helpful in a time of pandemic?

Answers on a postage stamp please.

The human element for me in the story of Elijah and Elisha is Elisha's loyalty to Elijah and his determination to carry on the his work.

A group of prophets (a description which in itself is a bit mind blowing) warned Elisha that Elijah was going to die.

“Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you?”

I love Elisha's response, “Be Quiet, of course I know it.” Stopping short of, mind your own business, there's enough to worry about without you interfering!

And then Elijah himself three times tells Elisha to stay where he is and he will go on alone and three times Elisha responds, “I will never leave you.”

And then when they reach their destination beside the river Jordan Elijah strikes the water with his cloak and the waters divide so that they can cross over on dry land.

That is beyond our imagining isn't it? Well, its beyond mine anyway!

Once as a new Christian I was asked to explain this dividing of the water by striking it with a cloak. Thirty years+ later I am still at a loss to explain it coherently.

However, we are told 50 of the group of prophets had followed Elijah and Elisha and they witnessed it.

The actual dividing of the sea is not actually the main message though – although it may well be the most awesome. (Until we come to verse 11 that is)

Elijah's cloak was a symbol of his authority and Elisha begged him to leave the cloak for him, this would mark Elisha as Elijah's successor; not so he could claim the fame but so that he could continue the work Elijah had begun.

Elijah responds by saying it's not up to him it will be God's decision.

And then we come to verses 11-12

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Wow!!! Nobody has questioned me about that yet (God is good)

With some trepidation I moved on to the Gospel reading.
Kettle back on ...

The Transfiguration of Jesus.

Tom Wright – who is my go to in desperation mode says;
Science teachers never tire, so I'm told, of the moment when a child first looks into a microscope. What up until then had seemed a boring little speck of dirt can suddenly become full of pattern, colour and interest. The child will never look at things the same way again; everything now has the potential to be more than it seems.

We are not used to, in our practical and logical world, expecting visions, we are more likely to think of them as hallucinations and reach for the doctors number. But what if actually what we put down to a trick of the mind is actually the veil of ordinariness being lifted, allowing us to see "inside" a situation.

Psalm 139:14

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

What part of our ego tells us that we know everything there is to know about ourselves. What proof have we that the human dimension of life is all that there is.

Why do we find it so hard to understand and accept that there is so much more than what we can see or understand to the human aspect of life? Our humanness also has a spiritual dimension. We are so much more than we can imagine or understand. Why is that so hard to accept? Are we afraid of looking any further, what if we lose control.

When we sing "I surrender all " what are we actually saying? I surrender all until it comes to something I cannot understand or makes me uncomfortable.

I'm sure lots of us in life have wrestled with a question or a seemingly unsolvable problem when we have suddenly been given an insight that helps us to see things differently.

This is what the Transfiguration is all about. The disciples have been having their ears opened by Jesus through the teaching they have received whilst being with him. Now it is time to have their eyes opened and they are shown Jesus, not just from a human point of view but from God's view.

They are allowed to see the glory of God.

The purpose of the Transfiguration is not to show that Jesus is divine, because Elijah and Moses are also included in the cloud of glory. The whole experience is to show that as Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented prophecy, they had indeed both been vital in preparing for the fulfillment of the coming of Jesus, who came to finish the job.

So the cloud was God's glory allowing the three disciples to see past their human vision and into the glory of God. A fuller reality was revealed. Just like a child with a microscope they saw, for a moment, a different reality and ever afterwards would see things differently they had, previously, seen Jesus as a teacher and friend but now they saw him bathed in the glory of God.

Maybe we haven't actually had such a dramatic vision of God's glory but many of us I am sure can relate to a sudden moment when things became clear.

Maybe we should spend time remembering those times and speak about them to others. After all, Jesus calls us to witness about God's love and presence in our everyday lives don't let's be afraid to tell others about them.

The chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire seen by Elisha was a vision just for Elisha. No one else witnessed it. It was a gift for him, a confirmation of his calling.

Peter, James and John were the only ones to experience the Transfiguration. The only ones to see Elijah And Moses. The only ones to hear God's voice telling them who Jesus was.

What a wonderful comfort this must have been when it came to the time of crucifixion and following persecution.

We hear about and read about people who claim to have had a vision from God and more often than not the claim is taken with a pinch of salt and the person witnessing can be made to feel foolish.

We must not be quick to discount something we don't understand.

We say with our lips nothing is impossible for God. Why then do we doubt, when the experience goes beyond our human understanding.

Do I believe Elisha saw the chariots and horses of fire?

Do I believe Peter, James and John saw Mose and Elijah?

Yes I believe those accounts to be a true gift of God, providing the confirmation they needed to continue their calling.

So if we should happen to be blessed with a similar experience don't let's be too eager to blame it on the cheese we ate late at night – it could be God lifting a veil to another dimension in order to help us see more clearly.

