

Heavenly Bodies!

2 Kings 2¹⁻¹²; Psalm 50¹⁻⁶; 2 Corinthians 4³⁻⁶; Mark 9²⁻⁹

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as slaves for Jesus' sake. [2 Corinthians 4⁵]

Happy Valentine's Day! I am not sure how you are marking it or how many secret admirers you may have sending you anonymous cards, but the links of romantic love to the readings for today are tenuous, at best.

Valentine's Day celebrates *Heavenly Bodies* and in Mark's Gospel, with the record of the Transfiguration, we encounter three heavenly bodies as **Moses and Elijah** appear with **Jesus**; and in the Old Testament reading we read about Elijah assuming a heavenly body surrounded by the **chariots of Israel and its horsemen**. Perhaps it isn't a good idea to encourage people to fantasise about heavenly bodies during a sermon!

One of the difficulties with romantic love is that it idealises things. Perhaps the most common mistake as a man and woman approach marriage is that men believe that the object of their affections *will not* be changed by marriage but that his wife is consumed by the hope that marriage *will* change him! That naivety in men is present in Peter's reaction to the Transfiguration – of fossilising a moment, an image, a feeling – so that it remains unchanged forever.

Today we will get to the Old Testament as our inspiration, but first we will look at how Peter engages with the Transfiguration as a lesson for what we should try to avoid:

- ✘ **Moses and Elijah** aren't present to point backwards – they are present as representatives of the law and the prophets to make it clear that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfilment of the hope of Israel and all the people of God. However good the past may have been, it should never be fossilised or worshipped but it can be allowed to inform who we are so that we know where we have come from. In a Church filled with so many significant memorials, I have to say that they are never the thing that defines us.

- ✘ Peter knows that he is privileged in what he has seen – **Rabbi, it is good for us to be here**. But Peter, the *rent-a-gob* of the disciples, is speaking because he doesn't know what to say. He and the others are **terrified** (I was going to make a pun on them being 'petrified' but decided not to). The clear speaking came from the **cloud** and said, **This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him**. We should not be afraid of the absence of words until they are the words that God gives; words about the Word.
- ✘ Peter is impetuous and he would have loved to have shared what they had seen. How difficult it must have been to have heard Jesus order, **tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead**. Yet, it is important to submit to God's perfect timing.

Elijah is positive because:

- ✘ Elijah knows what is coming and that he will have to say goodbye to his spiritual, Elijah mentor (and is subjected to those 'helpful' comments from two sets of prophets), but yet he keeps putting one foot in front of the other, moving towards what God has in plan. Sometimes, better things have to wait until worse things have passed.
- ✘ Elijah knows what he wants – **a double portion** – and it isn't in Elijah's power to give it. He has to say, **if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not**. What a powerful lesson this is for all of us – that we do not write spiritual cheques that we can't honour. However valid we may believe our prayers to be, the answer is with God!

Unlike Elisha, we aren't left looking for something that has gone but, as Paul reminds us, we see that perfect vision **of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. We proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord**. His isn't so much a heavenly body as a heavenly face: **the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**. He doesn't ask that we send him a Valentine's Card, but that our lives are our Valentine: **slaves for Jesus' sake**.