

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021**

**Mark 9:1-13      A sermon given by Elizabeth Cooper, St John's**

Today is Halloween. In our church it is not celebrated. In the town and supermarkets the shops have been full of the paraphernalia for several weeks now. I don't usually do this, but I have purchased this little ghost. It looks harmless and cute. It is a favourite symbol or character of the season.

But .. what does this little ghost represent? This little one is made to look happy and in no way trying to frighten or harm anyone. It is something which operates on several different levels. The children and adults who take this up the street will not think too carefully. It will inspire humour in some and for some the opportunity to scare people which will delight them.

Yet with closer thought or when alone a child or adult thinking a little harder is likely to become afraid because this creature represents and touches the world of the disturbed and unsettled, the world of darkness and the place of anguish not a place of peace. Even an atheist will agree that this object does not represent anything good. This little creature **represents the world of darkness**. I can put him away now.

You might think what have ghosts and the transfiguration got to do with each other. Is there any connection between ghosts and the transfiguration? Was Jesus appearing like a ghost to the disciples?

We will see the transfiguration of Jesus **is also** revealing another world

Two weeks ago when Tim was preaching. We heard how Peter said 'I understand now you are the Messiah the Christ the son of the living God' but did he really understand who the Messiah was? We get the impression that the disciples had thought that the Messiah was a deliverer from the oppression they felt under the Romans at that time. They wondered if he was the one to rescue them from their present oppression. As soon as Jesus started to talk about his death and suffering Peter was horrified. This wasn't the Messiah they were expecting. Death was defeating. Jesus couldn't die especially now, he was so young, he was a great teacher to them and trusted friend they'd only known him for 3 years; he can't die.

Jesus understood what they were thinking. He had a plan, he knew that they would need strength when they saw what was about to happen to him and they also needed to have a glimpse of who he really was. It was important for them to see this before he suffered and died. He explained to all the disciples that some of them would not know death before they had seen his kingdom.

They were confused and mystified by this.

Jesus took 3 close disciples Peter James and John to a high mountain. It is significant that Jesus chose 3 since traditionally 3 made for a secure witness in a court of law. Jesus led them up the mountain to pray. This was not unusual. Jesus often went up a mountain where he could be quiet. They did not know, but Jesus knew what was about to happen. He knew that it was important for them to see who he really was. They were going to see the new Kingdom in the form of Jesus. This was to fill them with courage and certitude in the days that lay ahead of them. His Heavenly Father was about to endorse who Jesus was and for them to know that they were to listen to Jesus.'

It certainly did. Every writer of the gospels has this incident. Each writer adds their own touches. But each one has the important aspects. And significantly Peter wrote about it in 2 Peter 1 :16. He says: We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of his majesty, For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son ,whom I love, with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

It had become a central place to their faith; they never forgot this moment. Even when they were facing persecution and challenges and maybe self-doubt. This memory would come flooding back to them.

Jesus went up the mountain huffing and puffing just as an ordinary man like they were. But then as he was praying, they saw him changed. The word used is morph. He's the same Jesus but just changed. Jesus was transformed. Yet they still recognized him as the Jesus they knew.

Mark tries to describe what was indescribable. He says that Jesus was clothed in white, but he also explains it was so bright and brighter than anything washing could do. The other writers talk about his face shining.

It wasn't just a strange apparition like we might imagine or an airy-fairy ghost. Jesus had substance.

Just for a moment the disciples could see Jesus as he really was it is like he unveiled himself. The skin..... *that like this dark and ordinary coat hides underneath a glorious brightness*.

So, the ordinary human skin of Jesus was folded back to reveal the glory he had 'laid aside' when he came down and took on the form of a human.

The word for glory comes from a Hebrew word which means heavy or depth or strength. This was the presence of God. It was something that was hard to describe in human words. It was brighter than anything they had ever seen. It was an iridescent whiteness. It would have made the shining white of Persil look dull.

This was a revealing of who Jesus really was. **He was revealing the glorious kingdom of light.** The ghost reveals he came from the kingdom of darkness but Jesus was of the kingdom of light.

Jesus was revealing that he had come to earth and taken the form of a human he was clothed as a human but underneath this human body was his real body. He had 'laid aside' his glorious body to take the form of a human. It is described as Jesus unveiling himself.

Then alongside him came Moses and Elijah. The disciples would know who they represented. Moses was a representative of the Law and Elijah was the prophets... but Jesus standing in the middle showed that he represented the 'completion' or 'fulfilment' of the law and the prophets. It wasn't that they didn't need them anymore Jesus completed the circle and so fulfilled the words of the prophets. There was strength and meaning in this. It linked Jesus to their past. To the history of their people.

This was a vision .. but what was it saying...? Just as the ghost reminds or speaks to us of another world that is negative and dark. So this transfiguration pointed to another world. It was the kingdom of light Gods glorious kingdom. As explanation the presence of God came and covered them. This wasn't a murky grey cloud; this was the bright and dazzling cloud of Exodus 40:38. The dazzling fiery cloud which had shown the presence of God in the desert. So, the presence of the Father God covered them all on this mountain now. Not to hide them from him, but to enclose them. Then they all heard a voice. This time, unlike at Sinai in Exodus 24: 16 when the people were commanded to listen to God speak. This time they were to 'Listen to Him, that is Jesus and not as at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan which was for the affirmation of Jesus. 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' This time it was changed to 'this is my beloved son 'listen to him'. The God they knew from their history was saying 'This Jesus is my beloved.' God was placing his authority on him, and they were to listen to him. It was like the Father's seal of approval.

In the transfiguration we have a glimpse of Christs glory.

What is also amazing is to recall how at the time of Christ's death the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. In this action the veil which had hidden the holy of holies was opened up. The glory of

God was revealed , not for a short time as in the transfiguration, but now for all time. As John 1:14 says ' We have seen his glory ,glory as of the only Son from the father...'

But not only that

This glory or presence was placed on the disciples at Pentecost and we who are believers hold that glory within us even now.

So what does this passage say to us.

Why did Mark include it in his account and why do all three gospel writers feel that it is such an important event that they have included it in their accounts.

It certainly came to the disciples at a timely moment. They were about to see Jesus suffer and die. As we have learnt it is thought that Jesus gave them this ...in order to give them the strength and courage to believe.

We saw in 2 Peter 1: 16-17 that he recalls the time ... as a pivotal understanding. 'I did not make all this up. I saw the glory.' We saw the glory.. it wasn't just one person it was 3.

Does their witness strengthen or have any influence upon us -our belief?

Does their sighting make a difference to us.? Do we just skate over the text? Many people say Jesus was a good man.

Does this passage show that he was more than just a good man? We may tell people of this event; they will find it strange and unreal to their daily life.

**What will convince them more is the glory that is within us.**

When the Holy Spirit is alive within us we will shine as lights. In other words, the glory of God will shine through us to the people around us. Our real selves will be revealed. As it says in 2 Corinthians 4:6

Do we believe that the light of Christ is shining within us?

What can we do to give the light more opportunity to shine through in our lives? Jesus took his disciples up a mountain to pray.

It is good for us to take time out. Are there things we do that take up too much of our time? Would it be better for us to do less and to spend time with Christ up the mountain? If our employment takes up all our time and thinking, what could we do to change things to allow Christ's light to glow through us.

What are we going to do? How are we going to find that quiet hill where God can commune with us and reveal his self to us; so we shine out to the people we live and work amongst, as we show love to them and concern and offer wisdom and advice in their difficult situations and be to the world the Kingdom of God.

**Let us pray;**

**Oh Lord we would be people who shine as lights in the darkness. We would be people within whom your glory shines out as we speak, live, and act in and by your holy Spirit. Hear our prayer oh Lord. Amen.**