

“Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus” Mark 9:8

During February I was part of the installations of two pastors in neighbouring congregations. It is fascinating being a fly on the wall at another pastor’s installation. To see the excitement in the people who have been waiting many months or even years for their pastor to come, to listen to their hopes and expectations for things to get moving again, for the crowds to come flooding back and all the unchurched in the area saved..... If only the poor guy only knew, he might turn around and go back where he came from!

But the pastor is not the messiah – by now you will have worked that one out for yourselves about me! If we stay long enough we all end up disillusioning even our greatest supporters! A lady said to me the other day about a former pastor “we loved him but it was time to move on.” There comes a time when pastors all need to move on and get out of the way, probably more so when they are adored! There is only one messiah, only one person who truly reveals God to us, one face of God, one saviour, one that is worth adoring and who we want to stay with us always, and that is Jesus Christ. And he is the centre of attention in the scene from today’s Gospel on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus, the holy one whose clothes shone like the sun. You think this gown is white, imagine being blinded by it! Jesus was covered in holiness and radiated glory, the glory of God. Then Moses appeared, Moses who had been given God’s law, the commandments and who was used by God to rescue the Israelites from slavery in Egypt – he was there, but he was not the messiah. Elijah also appeared, and he had spoken for God many times and we read this morning how God took him to heaven in a blaze of glory! But Elijah was not the messiah. Jesus is the messiah, the saviour of the world, the light of God’s presence with us, the face of God to us. And he takes centre stage there on the mountain. The commandments and the prophecies of the Old Testament only point to Jesus. And then the voice of God himself booms through the clouds

“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him! Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus”.

At the end of it all they were left with was Jesus. But all they were supposed to listen to and look to was Jesus.

The installation of a pastor is a good chance to dust off the call letter and you’ll notice in today’s bulletin I have been sent another one of those to consider. Whenever I read a call letter my first reaction is “Jesus!” – you’d have to be Jesus to fulfill all that you have called your pastor to be and do! But then when I read what you are supposed to do together with me you’d have to be Jesus too!

Jesus. That’s who we are meant to see when we come together especially on this mountain of worship. Jesus here with us, and that’s who we are meant to see in each other, Jesus. Don’t get the wrong idea. I am not Jesus, and God knows I can’t save any of you including myself. But when you come to worship in the presence of God all you are meant to see and want to see is Jesus who reveals God to you. And if any pastor is doing his job whenever you come to worship he will stand here not in his own holiness but covered in Christ’s holiness and representing him he will tell you your sins are forgiven “by the authority and command of the Lord Jesus Christ”. You are meant to hear that forgiveness as coming from Jesus himself! A pastor will baptize your children in Jesus’ name and they will be connected to Jesus, he will speak the words of Jesus in the sermon using Moses and Elijah – God’s law and prophets to point to you to Jesus, and when he preaches Christ’s words you are meant to hear them as from the Lord Jesus himself. And as he speaks the words of Jesus, Christ himself comes to you in the bread and wine of communion. He will raise his arms and bless you for the week ahead and you are meant to hear it as from Jesus, and see the arms of Jesus raised over you.

Jesus will be here waiting for you every Sunday, only you won’t see him, you’ll only see his representative, your pastor and each other. But you are meant to see and hear Jesus, listening to his words and recognizing his holy presence. The headings on the screen to the parts of the service every Sunday remind you it is really Jesus who is bringing you into God’s presence and leading you in worship of him.

Jesus. That's all the disciples saw once the dust had settled on the mount of transfiguration. After they had witnessed miraculous and incredible things, all that was left was Jesus, the humble Jesus who was heading for the cross to die for the world. The Jesus whose glory was hidden in weakness and servanthood and sacrifice. He was the one they were to listen to, look to and follow together.

Sometimes Jesus maybe very hidden by the humanity and weakness of the pastor, sometimes he will be veiled and hidden because you and I are not doing the work of listening and looking for him. On holidays listening to a retired pastor Jesus was hidden at the 32 minute mark of the sermon because I was falling asleep! The message was clear but I had stopped listening and maybe he should have stopped preaching! Not ideal, but Jesus was there. And what I missed in the sermon I got in holy communion - Jesus. Pastors are human, listeners are human, but look for Jesus, and listen to him when you worship.

Pastor Paul said in today's second reading:

“We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake” (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

Someone told me that he went to church while on holidays and the pastor spent 10 minutes on holiday stories and then sat down - that was the sermon. He told the pastor off on the way out of church. He wanted to see Jesus and Jesus only and the pastor got in road, he preached himself. If that ever happens tell me off on the way out too. And some times we can preach ourselves as churches more than Jesus too. We are not here to promote St Pauls but Jesus as Lord and ourselves, well we are only servants for his sake. And we especially obscure and hide God's grace for people in Jesus by leaving them thinking they have to save themselves some how. Or that Christianity is more about keeping commandments and rules and morals than about forgiveness from Jesus. If we confuse Moses with Jesus, turning the gospel into rules and laws we better tell eachother off, and if we confuse Elijah with Jesus and think we need some special revelation from God too or some special supernatural or super-spiritual experience instead of just trusting Jesus we'd better tell eachother off. When people come here we hope they meet God in Jesus Christ and hear and see him loud and clear, his love and forgiveness, his compassion and grace.

And it goes both ways, not only are you to see Jesus hidden in and standing behind and shining through the words and actions of the pastor for you when we come together on this holy mountain of worship but we need to see Jesus in each other. We don't just see each others' weaknesses and faults and sins when we come together we remember that the light of Christ shines in and through each of us, as the second reading today says:

“For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

Even on a bad day in the church we are meant to see and honour the light of faith in Christ that God has placed in eachothers hearts. To marvel that another person has been given the miracle of faith and sees God in Jesus Christ just as we do. And to treat eachother with honour and dignity because God has brought his light into eachothers hearts.

So when you come to worship what do you expect to hear and see? God wants you to come looking for Jesus and expecting to find him here and to listen to him here. Hidden in his word and communion, hidden in your pastor and in his people. As you do you will see God's face, his glory, and his light will continue to shine in your heart too.