

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Nicky Ing - 20th February 2005

Genesis 12:1-9; Psalm 33:17-21; Romans 4:1-17; Matthew 17: 1-9

The Bible presents Abraham as the great model of faith. At the age of 75, he felt called by God to leave all the security of his well-ordered life...his home, his family, and his country...and to set off on a journey...literally to 'God knows where'....to a country he had never seen. No maps in those days....no transport except a donkey, or a camel...and probably much of his journey would have to be made on foot. All that God told him was that this journey would bring a blessing on him and for all nations....but he first needed to put his trust in God....this would be a pilgrimage, a journey taken in faith and obedience to God's call and God's promise! So off he went....with no hesitation. No doubt he encountered plenty of trials and difficulties. 75 is a great age to start off on an adventure like that. Moses would have no land, because his life became nomadic.... and his wife Sarai at that stage had no children...but he travelled in hope, holding onto the conviction that God would do as he had promised. Many people today would say Abraham was taking a huge risk, yes he was! but we admire his faith in Gods promise, his courage and at the same time his vulnerability. Perhaps we can identify with Abraham because we too are on a journey....the journey of life. The image of the journey speaks of a passage through time and places; it includes the people we have met, the kind of time we have had, and the successes and failures we have experienced along the way. Everyone's journey is different, and unique in its own way. And we have to make it by ourselves: nobody else can do it for us. Perhaps one of the most important things we can learn along the way is that somehow we need to keep going. The reality is that we are involved in not just one but two journeys. The first is the outward one we make through our involvement with the world around us...and the second is an inward journey, a deeper search for an understanding of ourselves, and ultimately a search for God. So it is a journey of faith, which begins with an invitation from God...not necessarily into a new place like Abraham travelled to, but into a new vision, a new set of values; a new way of living. And we can't just say that because we have faith, it is going to be easy. At times, our journey may be along dark and difficult roads that we never imagined or wanted for ourselves. I am sure there must be many people here today who can identify with the struggles and the fears and the emotional pain which accompany us on our life's journey.

Today is the second Sunday in Lent, and at this stage in our journey towards Easter, the Church always focuses on the vision which is the Transfiguration...Matthew, whose gospel we read this morning, and Mark and Luke all tell this story....and in the previous chapter, Matthew tells us that Jesus understands his journey to death as one which will further God's plans. Jesus has warned his friends about his approaching rejection, trial and execution. Now they experience Jesus at prayer at a critical moment in his ministry, as he has set out on his final journey towards Jerusalem. Peter, James and John, who will also be with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, are given this wonderful vision of his final glory. The scene is on Mount Tabor, and the symbolism of the cloud and the voice of God are reminders of the Old Testament times when Moses (representing the Jewish

Law) shone brightly with the reflected glory of God on Mount Sinai. And Elijah (representing the O.T prophets) also heard the voice of God on a mountain as he stood at the mouth of the cave and wrapped his face in his mantle in the presence of God....Peter, the impulsive man of action, immediately offers to make 3 tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah...so that the glory of God can remain with them, as it did among the Israelites in the tent that Moses made for God in the desert. But God's voice, as it had been at the time of Jesus' baptism, is clearly heard, naming Jesus as his **Beloved Son**, and telling them to **LISTEN** to Jesus; and the cloud of God's presence surrounds them all so that they fall to the ground in fear. The experience has been a brief, momentary one, *but it is life-changing*. Many many years later, Peter wrote, in 2 Peter 1:18, '*we ourselves heard the voice come from Heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.*'

The story of the Transfiguration shows us how Jesus is strengthened to make the journey to Jerusalem, where he will face trial and execution, by the love and affirmation of his Father. Matthew is showing us that Jesus is not just the one who is to suffer, but that he is God's beloved own Son. So the suffering and the glory are revealed in the one person of Jesus. He is named and owned by the Father, and we are all to listen to him. I think that for us, it is helpful to remember that the experience of personal prayer is able to draw us closer to Jesus...it helps us to listen better....it helps us to live out our lives in obedience to his calling...it develops our relationship with him....and ultimately, the journey of our prayer is able to change us...to transfigure us too, if you like....to make us more into the image of God. So the transfiguration is about Jesus, YES....the radiant glory briefly glimpsed...a sign of the power of God's Kingdom...and we in our prayer journeys can begin to learn to reflect, however dimly, that wonderful radiance of God's love. Jesus first had to travel the road of suffering before he could experience the glory....we too in our humanness often have to experience much suffering...the promise though, is that Jesus is with us in all our difficulties and fears.

When the disciples fall to the ground in their fear at the sight of the transfigured Jesus, what does Jesus do? He comes to them and he **touches** them. The touch of Jesus always encourages, gives life, and heals. He asks them not to share their vision of his glory until his resurrection is revealed. We too receive glimpses of the vision of the glory of Jesus. I think it is only in the resurrection that we will understand these glimpses....but if we consider this story in the light of our Lenten journey, the reflection of the vision will, hopefully, carry us through to the glory of Easter. One of the temptations we face, particularly during this time, I think, is to become preoccupied with ourselves....either with a sense of our own achievements, or a sense of our failure and unworthiness. What we need to do is to try instead to look at God, to glimpse a vision of God's glory. If we are alert and aware, we can find God all the time in the ordinary things of our daily lives...we don't have to wait for a mountain-top experience. God is continually revealing himself to us...in the people we meet every day...in the beauty around us in creation...in many different ways. Let's keep looking out for reminders of his presence...little signs, little events...he cares for every detail of our lives..... we can rest in the knowledge that we are loved and supported. The power of God's love strengthens us to face whatever the future may hold...this love helps us to keep on travelling in the direction of God....until finally we will reach the full realisation of that love and glory.

In the words of the Psalm (33) we read earlier: “*We have waited eagerly for the Lord: for he is our help and shield. Surely our hearts shall rejoice in him: for we have trusted in his holy name. Let your merciful kindness be upon us O Lord: even as our hope is in you.*” May that be true for each one of us today; and as we continue on our Lent journey this week, let us become more aware of the ongoing touch of God’s love in our daily lives...his power to heal us, to give us new life and energy, and transform us into his image. We ask all these things in Jesus’ name. **Amen.**