

## Pentecost 17 2018

All of us have been to a live show, or to the cinema. As the main event begins, the house lights dim, and the warmers on the stage give way to a brighter light that focuses our attention. As the scenery illuminates, we are transported in our minds into another sphere, one where maybe an illusion, movement, and drama will absorb us.

Of course, that is the aim of good set design. Not every show is as successful. Sometimes, we end up being focused on the wrong thing. An upstaging moment has diverted our attention away from the storyline. The busyness of our mind refuses to let us focus on the story being presented. Life demands can intrude on the situation, and our attention to the detail of the story is not fully engaged.

Sometimes, the light dims for another reason, and we fail to grasp the reality. Cabin lights in a plane are dimmed for take-off so that in the *unlikely event of an emergency* our eyes are already accustomed to the dark. It is easier to see when our eyes are not being challenged by our reflexes catching up!

For Peter, James, and John, in a moment similar to the transfiguration scene, the light is not switched on for them, but rather, like the experience, we may have in a modern theatre, the revelation of whom

Jesus is becoming more and more apparent. The focus of Peter on this hill in the Gentile territory is becoming more and more apparent. However, for Peter, we're only into the end of scene 2: Jesus in the heart of the Roman north of Israel.

The synopsis so far has been the proclamation through word and deed in Israel to the Chosen people who strive with God: Israel. They have seen the Messianic mission first hand. Then, pivoting into Gentile territory, challenged by the Syrophonecian woman, and the subsequent feeding of manna to the 4000 outside of tribes of Israel, the Messianic presence, for Peter, is only too apparent.

However, Jesus goes a step further: he sets up the drama for the second act that is to follow, and the story takes on all the marks of a tragedy. Moreover, Peter is having none of it. Having realised who Jesus is, he struggles with the reality that will lead Jesus to the ultimate point of death, and death on a cross.

Behind Jesus' questioning is some exciting moments. "Who do people say that I am?" is a good question. "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." Also, focussing on the light that is now centre stage, Peter answers Jesus's straightforward question as the reality becomes obvious. The blind sees, the lame walk, the deaf hear

and the mute speak. Captives to all sorts of illness and infirmities are freed, and the message of freedom living in the presence of God is suddenly clear. 'Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." So he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.'

To fulfil the Messianic mission, there will be bloodshed: not a revolutionary bloodshed, but the death and resurrection of Jesus. As Paul would later summarise, "By one man came death, by the new Adam will come to the resurrection from the dead." Separateness from God will be atoned, and we will be one in the Christ.

However, for Peter, the second act has yet to have become clear. Basking in the light that was the culmination of the first act, Peter was going no further in his learning of who Jesus is. He was in the presence of greatness but was unable to accept that being in the spotlight, or even in the footlights of the Messiah was to come at a cost. Jesus' rebuke was harsh then and still is now. "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

A quick look at this proper name: Satan. The root word, Satan, is the test or tempting. We encounter it initially in the story of Job. Again, in Zechariah, there is a reference to being put to the test by something other than ourselves. Regarding the teaching that follows, it points to a

struggle that, as seen in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, is beyond this world. By the time we understand the world of Jesus, Satan has become a personification of evil in a cosmic struggle that will shape our history until the coming of the new dawn. By rejecting the need for the Son of Man to suffer, Peter is on the wrong side.

While Peter rebuked Jesus privately, Jesus then takes the rebuke back at Peter public, enabling him to remind them of the mission at hand. It will come at a cost. To set out minds on the task at hand, given that there is still a long way to go before the end of time, we hope, the cost for us in following Jesus is made abundantly clear. This is the divine mission that all of us, under baptism, are pledged to try and support.

We are to deny oneself: we are to give up any notion of ourselves being the centre of the universe. For the 'selfie'addicted modern generation, this may come as quite a shock and a challenge! For us to get ourselves to a post-Easter, resurrection reality, we need to give up ourselves to the point of actually going through Easter itself. This may be for us not so much our time of death and suffering, but some moment that is open to us being seen as being divisive, rebellious, and committed.

Next, we have a little translation concern with our modern English translators. Once again, behind the scenes, there is a word at use that is a little stronger than the word in our current text. Where you see and hear

the word "life" in this passage, we need to understand that our English translators back to Wycliffe and through the 17<sup>th</sup> century, had no other word for it. By the time we introduce the science of Freud and his vast array of conceptual friends, the original word used takes on a new meaning. The word is *psyche*.

We talk about the psyche; we talk about a concept deep in psychology and psychiatry. However, it is also steeped in Platonic philosophy and ancient Jewish anthropology. It is more than our physical life that is at stake: it is our very essence – our soul. If we put ourselves out of the centre of the purpose of life and let in Christ, then it is for the sake of our very core being.

This is very harsh and tough teaching, and what is more, given in the area of Caesarea-Philippi for a reason. To follow Jesus comes at a cost. To acknowledge Jesus as Son of Man and Saviour is to put the presence of God into our very soul and continue the work of the Messianic mission began and continued into our post-Easter world.

Our words, our actions, our direction: likened by James to a rudder on a ship, or the consequences of our tongues, must be in accord with that presence and love in our lives. Not all of us can teach, nor should we. However, we can let the light that is in the centre of our world begin to let others see the love of Christ in all that we do. That is the *wisdom that*

*cries out in the street...calling on them to put the fear [essence] of the Lord as their choice, otherwise, they are to eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.*

It's God first. At the heart of this stern Markan sandwich, it is God first. It is at the heart of the prophetic tradition of *seeking first the kingdom of God*. It is at the heart of the story that is Jesus, Son of Man and the Christ. It is at the heart of our story. It matters not if we understand this story through the revelation of blinding light or a slow reveal as if in a theatre, it matters not. What is essential is getting there.

Through our direction and encouragement of others, this is the Wisdom of the Ages we have been entrusted to share, and not everyone will get it. Once seen, we must accept that such revelation comes at a cost, and that cost is to give ourselves to making known the love of God made perfect in Christ Jesus. It will not always be easy, but, together, it is a beautiful story for us to share with all whom we meet as we offer them all who we are.