

19 February 2012

Reading: Mark 9: 2-13

### **Background to the reading**

Last year I preached on the same theme but Matthew's version. Matthew and Luke made use of Mark as a source for their rendering of the same reading. I will this morning try to show some of the differences between the three texts and explain the reasons behind the differences.

But our reading has many similarities with Exodus 24. Jesus also went up a mountain just like Moses did. And the Lord appeared to Moses after six days just like Jesus who went after six days up to the mountain where He too was transfigured. Moses' face was also "radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" just like Jesus' face and clothes who became white as "so as no fuller on earth can white them".

It seems evident that something more spectacular is happening to Jesus than what happened to Moses or even Elijah before. Mark, Mathew and Luke describe the glorious appearance of Jesus with different descriptions but all agree

that Jesus' whole appearance completely changed.

In the Old Testament two mountains were inextricably associated with God namely Mount Sinai or Horeb and Mount Zion. It is on Mount Sinai where the covenant between God and Israel was sealed, where Moses spoke to God, and where God revealed his presence. Mount Zion was another favored abode of God. These traditions clearly demonstrate the influence of Near Eastern mountain myth and specifically Canaanite mythology on Hebrew religion. Mount Zaphon was the sacred mountain of the Canaanite god Baal. Clouds were thought to be part of his entourage. References to the 'mountain of the Lord' and to the sacredness of mountains are extremely numerous in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament Jesus makes it clear that the worship of God was not restricted to any particular mountain. Yet, mountains figure prominently in contexts of worship, prayer, and events of great religious significance. The Sermon on the Mount exemplifies this continuing tradition. Jesus'

temptation occurred on a very high mountain as did his transfiguration. The Mount of Olives was also the setting for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. His betrayal occurred on the lower slopes at Gethsemane and it is reported that the Mount of Olives was the site of his ascension.

The fact that Elijah and Moses appeared is no coincidence. It is interesting to note that both Matthew and Luke give preference to Moses while mentioning him first and then Elijah. In Matthew's case it was important for him to say to his congregation that Jesus was much more than Moses whom they totally adored. Luke made use of Matthew's preference maybe for the same reasons although his "congregation" existed mostly of other nations who would not particularly have any preference at all! The Jewish people expected the return of both Elijah and Moses at the end of the age to make everything right that is wrong. Elijah and Moses entered into the presence of God at Mount Sinai also called Horeb in the Old Testament just like Jesus. It is clear that Peter did not have a clue what was going on. He offered to build three "skenas" for each of them. The Greek

word for “skenas” is tent, a covered place, a dwelling. When Israel was journeying through the desert, they also stayed in “tents”. Peter maybe was thinking to offer them some form of hospitality. (After all they were among the greatest of men through whom God spoke in the past.) Or simply because he wanted to make sure they stay a bit longer. Whatever the reasons, I think all the Gospel tries to emphasize the point that Peter did not understand Jesus’ true mission and identity especially what was lying ahead.

Then while he was still speaking a bright cloud covered them and God said for a second time that Jesus is His Son that He loves or actually as it says in the Greek text “His beloved or most dear Son”. Again the differences between the Gospel writers are evident. Matthew says that Jesus is the “beloved Son with whom God is well pleased” because he wanted to emphasize that Jesus is the chosen one, the Messiah. Luke just says that Jesus is the One whom God has chosen without mentioning that He is the beloved Son. All of them, Mark, Matthew, and Luke confirm that they must listen to Jesus because He is the Messiah. There is again the link with God

appearing to Moses in the cloud. It was also a cloud that followed the Israelites on their journey through the desert by day. In opposition to Baal worship, the Almighty God is present in the cloud.

Matthew adds then that the disciples fell onto the ground while Mark and Luke does not mention it at all. People often fell down to the ground in the presence of God. All the Gospels confirm that the disciples were then left alone with Jesus. Moses and Elijah disappeared. The meaning is quite clear: Now it is only Jesus who will fulfill all their needs. They do not need another prophet. Jesus is the Son of God and will through suffering bring them in the right relationship with God. Jesus then commands them to remain quiet in the meantime but once He is resurrected they must tell everyone what they have seen and heard. Now they see a glimpse of the glory that lies ahead.

It was common Jewish thought that the prophet Elijah would introduce the coming of the Messiah and the proclamation of the end of time. But only Mark and Matthew makes mention

of the disciples asking Jesus about the predictions of the coming of Elijah? Jesus answers them by saying that Elijah did come but they did not believe in him. Most probably Jesus was referring to John the Baptist who was considered to be a second Elijah because of all the similarities that existed between them and interestingly enough it is only Matthew who confirms this to be the case. But Jesus also mentions his coming fate. The people who got rid of John the Baptist will also get rid of Him!

Jesus was preparing his listeners for the coming journey of suffering and glory.

All the Gospel writers confirmed the one message: Jesus is the beloved Son of God who has come to save humanity. He is the Only Saviour and He must stand central in everything! He is the Only way to God the Father.

And then did you recognize that verse 6 is in brackets, well it is because the translators wanted to make clear that it was probably Mark's own comment rather than something he

received in the tradition.

#### **CH4 476:3,4      Mine eyes have seen the glory**

##### **Sermon**

The text verses for the sermon are Verses 2, 7: <sup>2</sup>After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.”

“Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!” Jesus went up the mountain to listen to God. God spoke and confirmed that He is the chosen One. He is the only One who will save humanity from sin, death and hell. He is the One who will through suffering take the sins of humanity on Himself. He is God’s beloved Son. Jesus listened and obeyed God by climbing the mountain of suffering and ultimate glory.

Then God commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus. It was by no chance that Moses and Elijah disappeared and only Jesus remained. It is the central message. They must listen to Jesus only. And yes the disciples did listen to Him – after his

resurrection they did spread the good news of salvation to everyone. They walked the walk and talked the talk. They also embarked on a journey that went up mountains, down the glens, through suffering and sacrifice which ended in glory.

The question we face today is: are we willing to climb the high mountains of this life with Jesus to realise that He is the only One whom we can listen too? Or do we just look at the mountains in our lives and think that we can climb them all by ourselves.

I remembered my first hiking tour with a church group when I was about 16 years old. It was in the Eastern Transvaal, today's Mpumalanga. There was this huge mountain and I still remember the fear I had climbing this mountain. I thought I would never in this life manage to get on top of it. But then when I did stand on the top and looked down, everything seemed relatively small. I was absolutely amazed! The funny thing was that the bad memories I had of fear, tiredness and being thirsty all the time as I climbed the mountain disappeared.



I guess the same is true when we climb the mountains of this life especially when we suffer illnesses, abuse, broken relationships, family feuds, poverty, and war. When we climb these mountains of brokenness and pain we often find it so hard and difficult especially when we try to climb it all by ourselves. And often we find ourselves as bystanders of others who are climbing these mountains and then we are so aware of the frailty and finiteness of humanity, and how hard this life can be.

And this where this morning's strong message lies: We do not have to climb the mountains of this life all alone, we can climb them with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We can hold on to his hand and get strength, hope and faith in the assurance that His Holy Spirit is helping us each step of the way. And then when we do get to the top, meaning when we face death, all the pain and struggling will disappear and we will be ONLY aware of the Mighty presence of God our Father.

So we have to listen to Jesus and hold on to him because He is God's beloved Son who made it possible for us all to reach the top of the mountain with the help and support of His Holy Spirit.

How do we listen to Jesus?

Sometimes we are so busy living our own lives that the buzz and hustle of everyday life silence Him. Sometimes we can be so busy "playing" church that we forget to listen to Jesus as the head and sole of the church. Sometimes we can even have long lists of everything we "presumably" do right in the eyes of the Lord, without listening to Jesus.

Why can I make such a claim? Well the proof is often in the pudding itself. If we listen to Jesus, it will be evident in our lives of faith. Let me explain:

If we listen to Jesus we will grab each and every opportunity to talk to others about his sacrifice on the cross, his resurrection and ascension,

If we listen to Jesus our world would look totally different – it would be a world where all people live in peace and harmony, a world where love and not greed is the key

If we listen to Jesus our churches would look totally different – it would be churches where the Bible text is preached, where “nonsense” does not prevail, where people do not worry about their own opinions or power plays, where people worship with love in harmony, where the church is more concerned about the Gospel and the salvation of Jesus.

If we listen to Jesus, the prayer meetings will be packed with people, we will sing louder, pray more faithfully, sacrifice more, love vigorously, without any discrimination, and at all times have hope for the new kingdom to be with God forever and ever.

If we listen to Jesus we will hold on to Him, knowing that when we die in faith, death is destroyed and we can cry with hope.

If we listen to Jesus we will know that our journeys of faith

might not be easy but that the glory would be greater in the end,

If we listen to Jesus we will be able to climb the steep mountains of this life and reach the top where we will find God, his peace and presence.

If we listen to Jesus we will not be disheartened when we stumble over rocks of pain and suffering or are overcome by long glens of grief and sorrow

If we listen to Jesus our journeys will have meaning and joy always seeing the bigger picture, always looking out for the mountain top.

May we all start this new journey with Jesus on the way to Easter listening to His voice, holding on to His hand of love and mercy. May we also find hope, love and peace, as we tread with Him the Via Dolorosa, the road of suffering to His ultimate glory! He indeed climbed the Mountain of suffering for you and me. May we tell all the people whom we meet to hold on to His hand...nae matter what!

Amen