

Transfiguration 2020

2 Peter 1:16-21, Matthew 17:1-9,

Six days later! If we were reading a novel or a newspaper we would immediately be thumbing back to see what occurred six days before. To understand what has just occurred, this extraordinary event; we need that information.

We often hear the term 'identity politics' spoken of today it's an expression that former generations would not have used or understood. But the politics of identity have always existed, they have existed in terms of colour, class, creed or race and a multitude of others. Today of course identity is often spoken of as something that is fluid, ever changing. Jesus speaks in these terms of identity six days before the events that we heard today. He says to his disciples 'who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And then importantly he asks them 'but you... who do you say that I am?' Now up until this point Jesus hasn't spoken about who he is, his identity is something of a mystery; for many he is an extraordinary teacher, a Rabbi for others a healer, a miracle worker. He simply and rather enigmatically calls himself 'the Son of Man.'

What is my identity, says Jesus six days ago, what do you say? Perhaps it is *the* most important question in the Gospels for you and me, because our response to this question says as much about us as it does about Jesus. Peter of course speaks up 'you are the Messiah' and Jesus blesses him. The next six days however must have been among the most difficult of their short time with Jesus. He warns them of his forthcoming clash with the authorities, of his suffering and death and he argues with Peter. Jews demand signs, Greeks wisdom says St Paul, there is no precedent for the cross; and then to be told that they too must bear their own. Their identity as followers of Jesus in is the process of being completely remade. It must have been the longest six days of their lives.

To all intents and purposes Jesus appears to be completely disinterested in the conventional politics of identity. He mixes with all manner of folk, he calls out the religious elite, hypocrites he calls them, in other words you are playing a role, but it is not your true identity. He re-identifies James and John as 'Sons of Thunder' and Simon he renames Peter 'the Rock.' The Brothers Boanerges, who's Mum has to speak up for them and Peter the man who would sob at his denial of Jesus, their new identities initially seem almost satirical.

Six days later. We can only wonder what these three were thinking, Peter, James and John as they were led up a high mountain by Jesus. Simon son of Jonah, and James and John the sons of Zebedee their conventional identity was to be found in the normal way of their day. They were the sons of...in much the same way as our surnames often speak of great grandmothers or grandfathers of many generations past, or perhaps of long forgotten trades

or places or clans. They were fishermen who were being remade they were becoming fishers of people. Metamorphosis, transfiguration, it is about discovery, it is about true vocation, it is about true identity. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white...Metamorphosis.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision *until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.*' While each one of us is unique and gifted we share a fundamental identity. Our primary identity as Christians lies in the fact that we are '*people of the resurrection.*' Alongside the diversity that marks out Christians throughout the world, we must affirm that this is a common character that binds us together as Christians. From earliest times of Christian history, the followers of Jesus have seen their central role as being 'witnesses of the resurrection.' It is only in the light of the resurrection that the matter of Christian identity can be glimpsed: The Transfiguration is described by Jesus as a vision, it is a vision of the resurrection, but as Jesus warns his disciples it will not be understood this side of the cross.

As we travel together we seek to live out our Christian identity, we are stewards as it were of Christian identity, it is not mine or yours in the way we might understand identity today, it is ours. Stewardship implies the nurture and sharing of something, something special; this is our call as we seek to encourage others to discover this identity and vocation in light of it; it is perhaps timely that we ask the question 'who do we say that we are?'

Who do we say that we are? We are people journeying together, on this journey we endeavour to both deepen our understanding of our Christian identity, whilst committing ourselves to faithfully living out this identity. We can see this journey in the lives of Peter, James and John, whose identities were gradually and painfully shaped by following Jesus. Peter would become a foundation and the brothers men of courage as they together established this community, our community.

It is community is not built on myths or ancient tales but in lives lived out faithfully in the light of the resurrection and in this way we too will build this community founded by those eyewitnesses. The Transfiguration was not a private experience for Jesus only. Those three would also be transfigured, find their true identities and I pray that we will too. Perhaps in conclusion we should dwell on the words of John 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' Amen.