

When I was 19 I went on my first holiday without my parents. My brother and I went to stay with some friends outside of Brisbane near the Glasshouse Mountains. (Expo 88). It is a very beautiful area where large mountains poke up out of the coastal plain.

One morning our friends had convinced us that we should get up before dawn and hike to the top of Mt Tibrogargan (the biggest) to watch the sunrise. It was one of the longest mornings of my life. I had no idea how steep Mt Tibrogargan was. We climbed in the dark up the gravel incline. The higher we got, the more frightened I became – I was terrified that when we arrived at the top I would never be able to get down again – or worse – we would fall. Most of the time I was crawling on my hands and knees.

Eventually my fear subsided and as dawn approached we reached the final ridge. We came to the top, and looked out over the plain, only to be met by clouds – and bits of sunlight that were fighting to get through. We were exhausted and there wasn't even a glorious sunrise!

And then as we sat, the shapes of the clouds and the sun and the mountains played with each other and we became filled with awe – the sight – this sunrise was more spectacular than I could ever expect. We sat in silence for a long time, and then our friends said it was time to leave as we were all getting cold. It was so hard to leave that view – its strangeness and surprise. But also having to confront the fear of going down the steep slopes to reach the base of the mountain and breakfast!

On the last Sunday before Lent we hear two readings of journeys to the top of the mountain – first the experience of Moses experiencing the Glory of the Lord (like a fire on the mountain) and then the story of Jesus transfiguration. In both accounts they are drawn up a mountain for time alone with God and encounter the amazing. In our gospel Peter, John and James withdraw with Jesus to a quiet place to pray. The gospel tells us that the disciples are weary (tired) – this is possibly both physically and spiritually tired. Their ministry was relentless and yet Jesus calls them away to a quiet place to pray. I wonder what the disciple's expectation was – did they expect rest or replenishment? Were they looking for a spectacular sunrise, or hoping for some sleep? Or maybe some insight into the journey that lay ahead? Jesus was important in their lives and their expectation was that they will have him always – but the disciples too have to deal with change and a moving landscape.

Whatever their expectations I suspect what happened was more than a surprise! A vision so spectacular that I wonder how they processed what they were seeing. But I often wonder too how they lived what they knew after it had taken place. How did they go back and embrace the everyday ?

When we have had it all – whether we know it or not- when we have seen the vision of heaven – when we have had the ‘mountain top experience’ – how do we live with these things? How do we live when our expectations and our current experiences clash?

The disciple’s expectation of Jesus changed as Jesus appearance changed – there expectations were expanded again and yet as they walked away from this - *he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.* How strange this must have felt not to be able to talk about such an experience? But also, how do you live as though nothing has happened after such an experience?

But we may all have had experiences like this, I know it can often be true in the things I encounter each week. So often the best things that happen are things that I can never share with anyone – trust is a critical component of ministry – I wondered what this must have felt like for Peter, James and John – not to be able to share the best bits of what they knew of Jesus.

Today is the last Sunday before Lent – our last chance for a little party before the Lenten discipline. In some parts of the church it is celebrated as Mardi Gras – the last bit of loud celebration and gluttony before the Lenten Fast!! The lectionary gives us this vision of the glory and splendour of Christ each year before we turn to Ash Wednesday – it reminds us of the power of Christ as we prepare to turn and walk towards the cross - to focus on what is important to us – our discipleship in Christ.

In the past weeks we have heard a great deal about Jesus ministry - there has been much teaching and healing, many arguments with Pharisee’s and a growing understanding of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. At the end of all this Jesus draws them apart and they go away to the mountain – we assume to pray.

In all of the busy-ness of his ministry, in all the work that is still to be done, Jesus takes his key leadership team away – to reflect –to focus – to clarify – and to pray. This is one of the things which Lent offers to us a chance to draw away – to reflect – to focus – to clarify – and to pray.

Lent is not meant to be a dreary time – rather it is a time for us and to take time to re-centre our discipleship. When Jesus took those three disciples up the mountain they saw a vision that would sustain them throughout their whole life and ministry and re-affirm what they knew to be true that Jesus was the son of God.

Our Lenten discipline has the potential to give us the same opportunity. It is a time for penance and reconciliation – a time to restore relationships and our sense of peace in the church and in all our relationships. But it is also time to consider what

we do with the past, what we do with what we see, and experience, and how we allow it to inform that way we live rather than paralyze us in the past.

So in the 40 days that follow Ash Wednesday we are invited to go with the disciples up the mountain with Jesus to pray and re-affirm our faith – and to be joyful in our relationship with Christ. I wonder what we will find during these 40 days... I wonder if like the disciples we will have a vision that will sustain for the rest of our lives, and encourages us to live.

The challenge however is not what we see or experience but what we do with it. Do avoid Lent because of some memory or experience in the past? Or can we hear the word of Jesus to 'get up and do not be afraid of what we see'? Have the courage to walk down the mountain too! We may have to be prepared to not fully understand what we see and take time to continue explore what God is saying to us. It is helpful to note that in many ways it wasn't until Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter and the disciples finally got the point of the vision they had seen. But when they did, the purpose of their lives took on a new dimension. They started doing the things that Jesus did when he was with them -- teaching, healing, and forgiving.

Today on this last Sunday before our Lenten journey – let us be reminded of the wonder and drama of the glory of God. Let us celebrate the mystery of the vision of Christ in our midst – but also let us begin to think about the journey which lays before us – what steps will we take this Lent to make time to walk up the Mountain with Christ and witness fullness of God in our lives in unexpected ways. And maybe to do this we have to let go of our past experiences, even our past experiences of Lent – so that we can take this journey in a new and fresh way. A journey that invites us not only to draw away up the mountain, but to have the courage to also come down again and to live in Christ. Amen.