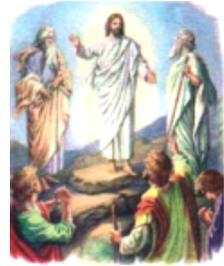


Sunday 11th February 2018

The Sunday next before Lent

Quinquagesima

Green



Collect

Almighty Father, whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death upon the cross: give us grace to perceive his glory, that we may be strengthened to suffer with him and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

2 Kings 2:1-12 English Standard Version (ESV)

Elijah Taken to Heaven

² Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." ⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." ¹⁰ And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." ¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of

them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

COMMENT: This story of Elijah’s passing his role as the leading prophet of Israel his time to his disciple, Elisha, has the markings of a heroic folktale preserved as oral history. It even has an element of a ballad about it. The story tells of the journey for Gilgal to Bethel and on to Jericho where the two prophets miraculously crossed the Jordan and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind. Elisha’s refusal to stay at either Gilgal or Bethel ultimately gained its reward as he finally witnessed Elijah’s ascension. Elijah’s repeated rejection of Elijah’s instructions sounds very much like the refrain of a minstrel’s song. So does Elisha’s instructions to the company of prophets the two meet at each holy site. The most likely location is about seven miles north of Bethel, a shrine in the central mountains north of Jerusalem. Bethel, of course, was famous in Israelite religious history as the place where centuries earlier the patriarch Jacob had his dream and received a renewal of the divine covenant made with his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham (Genesis 28). By the time of Elijah and Elisha in the 9th century BC, both Gilgal and Bethel had become the location of prophetic guilds associated with these spiritual leaders of Israel's God in their struggle against the syncretist tendencies of monarchs such as Ahab and Jezebel. It was members of these guilds who followed Elijah and Elisha on their journey. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (verse 8) also recalls the story of Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea. At first, Elijah divided the waters so that he and Elisha could cross over on dry ground, but eastward bound. In verse 14, having seen Elijah ascend in a chariot of fire, Elisha repeated the same miracle crossing, returning to the west side of the river bearing Elijah’s mantle. As it stands now, the whole story shows that the spiritual gifts Elisha inherited were the same as those of his predecessor and in the same prophetic and covenantal tradition as Moses and the patriarchs.

Mark 9:2-9 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Transfiguration

9 ² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one^[a] on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi,^[b] it is good that

we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son;^[c] listen to him.”⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Footnotes: a. Mark 9:3 Greek *launderer* (*gnapheus*). b. Mark 9:5 *Rabbi* means *my teacher*, or *my master*. c. Mark 9:7 Or *my Son*, *my* (or *the*) *Beloved*.

COMMENT: Immediately after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, Mark tells of Jesus’ transfiguration to show that Jesus stands in the historic prophetic tradition of Moses and Elijah. This continuity of ancient Israel’s faith and the church in Rome for which Mark was writing said to both Jew and Gentile Christians that they belong to the same faith tradition. The same God who had covenanted with Israel and inspired the prophets had now fully realised through Jesus Christ God’s magnificent purpose of salvation designed before the creation of the universe. About AD140, Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, reported that Mark had committed to writing what he remembered of Peter’s recollections of Jesus. This pericope (Scripture selection) could well have been one of those recollections. While it does have the sense of immediacy found in an eyewitness account, it also has literary qualities in that it fulfils the intent of Mark’s gospel of identifying exactly who Jesus is. There is, however, an unmistakable difference from Peter’s confession. The voice from the cloud not only confirmed Peter’s confession but recalled the voice of God speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:7-25. Mark undoubtedly wanted his audience to make that connection. Jesus being transfigured and having his clothes become dazzling white also made another significant connection with the Jewish tradition. The *shekinah* of the LORD, a word used in rabbinic writings but not in the Old Testament, expressed divine imminence or universal presence. The word literally meant “that which dwells” and clearly designated the LORD’s dwelling on earth as in heaven. This spiritual manifestation of the divine presence had a close association with the OT term “the glory of the Lord” represented by dazzling light. Accordingly, the temple in Jerusalem had been built facing eastward so that the brilliance of the rising sun would fill the holy precincts at the hour of the morning sacrifice. In the Corinthians reference above, Paul also saw “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun” (Acts 26:12-18; cf. 9:3-9; 22:6-11). So also did the shepherds in Luke 2:9. Wherever it appeared in the apostolic record, this phenomenon reiterated both divine presence and the element of continuity between the Old and New Testaments.

Psalm 50 *Deus deorum* Grail Psalter

℟ I will show God's salvation to the upright.

¹ *A Psalm of Asaph.*

The God of gods, the Lord,
has spoken and summoned the earth,
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

² Out of Zion's perfect beauty he shines. **℟**

³ (Our God comes, he keeps silence no longer.)

Before him fire devours,
around him tempest rages.

⁴ He calls on the heavens and the earth
to witness his judgment of his people. **℟**

⁵ "Summon before me my people
who made covenant with me by sacrifice."

⁶ The heavens proclaim his justice,
for he, God, is the judge. **℟**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: While these few verses do not show it, the whole of the psalm is unusual in that it seems to denounce sacrificial worship in favour of more spiritual forms. It points to Zion (i.e. the temple in Jerusalem) as replacing Mount Sinai as the place from which God delivers authentic messages about righteousness and justice.

Post Communion

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus Christ: may we who are partakers at his table reflect his life in word and deed, that all the world may know his power to change and save. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary, fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen**