

Reflection for 15th February (Sunday before Lent)

The story of the Transfiguration of Christ, with all its drama of clothes turning dazzling white, Moses and Elijah appearing, the cloud and the voice from heaven, is all about showing us who Jesus really is. Six days earlier, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had asked his disciples who they thought he was, and Peter had declared "You are the Messiah": now this fact is confirmed for him and the other disciples by this strange experience on the mountaintop.

We might imagine that the people who were chosen to share in this dramatic event were people of a very special kind – but this was not the case. On that occasion six days earlier when Peter had made his declaration, Jesus had spoken of this coming suffering and death – whereupon Peter had told him that he, Jesus, had got it wrong. Jesus had then rebuked Peter for having his mind on a human rather than divine level. Nothing very special about Peter there, then. James and John, the other two who went up the mountain, were shortly afterwards to reveal their own preoccupations when they got into a dispute about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And all three of them, when it came to the crunch, failed to keep watch with Jesus.

So in fact there was nothing special about these three followers of Jesus, and that should be an encouragement to us – because we know that there is nothing particularly special about us, either. And yet God calls us to be his followers, too: to be his friends, to do his work, to be his messengers.

Those first friends of Jesus found it remarkably difficult to comprehend who he was; despite all the clues they were given, they still repeatedly failed to grasp his message. Perhaps it was because their background had led them to expect that when God came among them it would be all about power and victory and domination.

But, of course, the God who is revealed in Jesus is not about any of these things: he is about love and service, about sacrifice and suffering, about compassion and selflessness. That is why the disciples failed to understand. The human way had been tried so many times before and had simply brought more pain and anguish. God's way to bring healing and wholeness to the world through love and sacrifice was, as yet, incomprehensible.

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