

Who really knows us? Who really sees us? The gift of friendship, and more intimate relationships is that as we spend more time with one another, and as we share with each other the story of our lives we allow others to see us a little more. And in truth sometimes we see ourselves a little more too.

But it is not that unusual to spend a life time with someone and still not know the story of them. I often see this at funerals when even seemingly close families find things out after the holder of the 'secret' has died. Sometimes these disclosures are dramatic when at the end of life we discover that a cousin was a sister, or that the family had migrated 70 years ago and the following generations were never told. But in fairness it is not really the dramatic revelations that are the hardest; rather it is the reality that a person was more spectacular, more amazing, more gifted than many of their closest friends and relatives had realised. The secrets of our personhood often are our achievements or our talents – our ability to care for others for example. The revelation that a person who bought a hot meal to Mrs Jones every Friday, or washed the windows in secret, or dropped off a bag of food at just the right moment.

I remember a story from my childhood of an old carpenter who swapped a walking stick for a rusty bucket his neighbour had – saying he was using 'rusty buckets' for storage in his workshop. He knew his neighbour needed a walking stick but was too proud to take what had been made for him; but a trade gave him a little dignity in receiving what he needed.

So often the secrets of our lives are about kindnesses that no one will ever know.

But the sad thing is, that sometimes because these things are secret we don't see the best of people, we don't appreciate their contribution or even their potential – and so a moment, a possibility is lost. What are the revelations of our personhood we may need to let shine?

Our three readings today pick up on this need to truly look and listen; see and hear – who we have before us. They are stories of revelation – though the word transfiguration is used – this is a special kind of revealing when the light and potential of the person shines out revealing not only them, but the potential God has placed within them; and lay out the journey which is ahead. It seems to be like a very public pronouncement by God of the call we are required to follow.

In second kings we meet Elijah and Elisha who are miracle-working prophets and their exploits will have no equal until the miracles of Jesus. Jewish readings see Elijah and Elisha as one of the pairs of great men who lead each generation from Moses and Aaron to the time of rabbinic period. Indeed, Moses is Elijah's miracle-

working forbear. Elijah demonstrates his connection to Moses by parting the waters of the Jordan as Moses did the Sea of Reeds, traditionally called the Red Sea¹.

There are many things in this passage about the transition of leadership which we might focus on in terms of our own understanding of transitions; and also about who we listen to or follow. But in the context of the other readings there are two things which stood out for me. Firstly the strength of the leadership which both Elijah and Elisha seems clear and it is not only confirmed by them, but by many other prophets who accompany them – and also by God. But I am also intrigued by the conversation between Elisha and the other prophets ‘ You know that he is to be taken up’ – each time Elisha answers yes. Within these relationships they appear to be looking out for one another – looking for the revealing of things that are new and possible. What is revealed about these prophets – to the community and to themselves?

As Elijah is taken up in the whirlwind, having completed his turn as prophetic leader, and also as mentor - Elisha is left in a new role with the larger-than-life legacy of his predecessor looming over him. If he is daunted by it, he shows no sign. Here, Elisha has his own transfiguration experience. He becomes the senior prophet of his community, empowered by the gifts of the prophet who nurtured his own gifts. Elisha must now move forward knowing who he is, and what he is called to do. Some of the prophets around them will understand this – but many will not have seen, or heard.

This passage is read today alongside Mark’s version of the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. So much happens in this story which is only 6 verses long.

In Mark’s Gospel, which is quite different from the accounts in Matthew and Luke, the story of the transfiguration is full of concealment and secrecy, yet the Transfiguration says that this Jesus has plans to be conspicuous². What he will disclose is not necessarily the secrets of the universe or the meaning of life; rather, it’s himself. He may be hard to see clearly in all his intricate detail, what with the radiant glare and the transfigured body, but -- sometimes, at least -- he’s surely there.

Because the Transfiguration is so bizarre and unusual, it can be easy to assume that we’re supposed to approach it with sober reverence and awe. But I’m not sure that’s how God views it. For God, the Transfiguration presents an opportunity to declare love for the one called “Son.” To tell the secret of his identity.

One of the things I like about the transfiguration is that it is between the Incarnation – that moment when Jesus is born as one of us; and the Resurrection – that moment when Jesus returns to God in heaven. It somehow holds that moment between

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3562

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2341

humanity and divinity – a place that we have hold in our faith at all times. There will be days and times when we feel totally human, maybe even separate from our understanding of God. There will also be those times when we have a sense of the divine – when our humanness feels distant and our sense of God seems to be pervading. But often both of these experiences might happen in the course of one day or moment – times when God feels close and times when God feels far away. In some way the transfiguration seems to hold both of these things together in a reality of messy-ness rather than some kind of divine impossibility.

It says something about who we are as people of faith, attempting like Elisha, and all the prophets who have gone before to understand our place in the world and who God is calling us to be. It also says something about Who really knows us? And Who really sees us? And I guess also how we see ourselves in relationship with God – in the reality of our humanity exploring our encounter with the divine.

It is no accident that we hear this reading each year on the last Sunday before Lent – for Lent is a time which holds humanity and divinity in focus. It is why in our Lent flyer we start with the statement ‘Lent is not about being miserable – it is a season of joy’

Often we can be encouraged to think that the season of Lent is all about people giving up their favourite treats or worse attending rather dreary Lent Groups and study, additional services and soul searching.

Neither approach really does justice to the wonderful opportunity of the 40 days of Lent. There is a focus on study, and reconciliation and fasting – but in a way that draws our humanity into the light of divinity. That is, draws us into the mystery of Christ and invites us to see Jesus in ourselves and in our midst.

So as we come on Ash Wednesday and are marked in ash with the sign of the cross – we are reminded of our humanity, we are also invited in the 40 days that follow to enter into the spirit of the transfiguration and see Jesus and ourselves anew. I wonder what we will find during these 40 days... I wonder if like the disciples we will have a vision that will sustains for the rest of our lives – invites us to recognise the mystery, and see Christ around and within us. Or maybe it will be like Elisha, we are given courage to take the next step?

The challenge however is not what we find or learn in these 40 days, but what we do with it. 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. We may have to have the courage to see ourselves, and those around us in a new way – to see the light and potential of ourselves shine out revealing not only ourselves, but the potential God has placed within us. Whatever we encounter this Lent , may we have the courage to let it help us grow. Amen