

Bedazzled or Deaf?

Luke 9:28-36

In the late 1980's there was a pop group called Bros which featured identical blond twins Matt and Luke Goss. They had only one really big hit that was called "When will I be famous?" to which the obvious answer was "Not for very much longer." But for a few months they were the flavour of the month with teenagers, especially the girls.

The Bros business offices were just across the road from where I used to work in Covent Garden, London, and this meant for those months there were hundreds of teenage girls who would hang around in the street hoping to catch glimpse of their heroes. And when they finally did appear there would then be very animated discussions amongst the devotees as to who was better looking, seemingly blind to the fact that they were truly identical twins. They also managed to miss the fact that the talented one was really the much shorter and distinctly less attractive bass player, Craig Logan

It is ironic that we can be blind about those that we long to see, those who are our heroes. We actually do not see them clearly, we will not see anything which does not fit with the image that we already have. Think about a time when you first heard some criticism of one of your heroes? We are not only dazzled by our heroes we are bedazzled, blinded, by them.

Today as we look at a dazzling experience of some of Jesus disciples we will have to wonder are we seeing clearly but perhaps also are we deaf.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

A spotlight on the passage

Our passage from Luke comes just after a great turning point in the Gospel. Herod has asked of Jesus "Who is this?" Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" Peter has answered that Jesus is the Christ leading Jesus to start teaching what kind of Christ or Messiah he is.

It is eight days after this that Jesus takes his closest companions, Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. Whilst he is praying something changes, he starts to shine, he is, to use the technical theological language, transfigured. Two other figures appear talking to Jesus who we discover are Moses and Elijah. It seems to me to be proof that there are name tags in heaven, how else did they know who they were?

There is something wonderful touching about v32. As often seems to happen with the disciples they are struggling to stay awake, which is encouraging to us all who have had that experience at prayer meetings. But now through bleary eyes they witness this extraordinary and unexpectedly bright meeting of three great heroes of the faith. Can you imagine their excitement? No wonder Peter says "It is good for us to be here."

When it looks like it is about to end Peter, who can't contain himself anymore, blurts out something about building tents so the soiree can continue. The Scripture has a wonderfully concise comment on this idea: "not knowing what he said".

It can be like that when you meet your heroes. I once met a musical hero of mine a Christian musician called Larry Norman, who walked up to me and said "Hi, I'm Larry". I had dreamed of this moment, I had so many questions, so many great songs I wanted to thank him for, but all I could say was "I know" That was my experience of "not knowing what he said"

But now they move from not knowing what they are saying to not knowing what is happening as everything disappears in a cloud from which comes a voice "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" The cloud lifts and only Jesus remains.

Understandably not only bedazzled but rather bewildered by the whole experience, the disciples, we are told, remained silent in those days about the whole experience.

Did it happen?

This line and the unusual nature of the events described here have led some scholars to doubt the historicity of these events, seeing them as legend or myth written back into the Jesus stories.

However the rather unusual nature of the event would surely have made it hard to talk about.

How was your day dear? Oh you know, prayer meeting, Jesus lit up like a neon sign, Moses and Elijah popped in, Peter made an idiot of himself, God spoke to us from a cloud, but at least I stayed awake.

It would not be until after the resurrection that some of this would have made some sense. As people talked of the resurrection and said have you ever seen anything like it Peter, James and John could have said "Actually now that you mention it ..."

If Jesus can be raised from the dead and shown to be God's glorious Messiah then I have no problem in seeing in this account a memory of when there was a preview of that glory (note the use of the work "glory" in v31, a word often associated with resurrection.)

APPLICATION

The Uniqueness of Jesus

Both the resurrection and this event point to the fundamental uniqueness of Jesus. This is highlighted, if you will excuse the pun, in numerous ways in this story.

You can imagine that good Jewish boys may have often had arguments about who was better Moses or Elijah and they would have compared their exploits rather like boys today compare their favourite superheroes.

That Jesus is mentioned in the same sentence as Moses and Elijah puts him in great company. But notice we are told that they are talking with Jesus, not Jesus talking with them. He is not just part of them he is the centre of attention.

This is something that Peter needs to understand. Peter doesn't know what he is saying because by his suggestion of an impromptu bivouac for them all he is treating them as if the three were all of equal importance. It is Peter's suggestion which seems to be the cause of the coming of the cloud and God speaking. The voice leaves us in no doubt as to who is to be the centre of attention, underlined again that when the cloud lifts they see Jesus alone.

Is this how you think of Jesus, the centre of God's purposes, his Son, his chosen one? He is not just one of a pantheon of great religious figures: Moses, Mohammed, Buddha. He is above them all. Even in saying that we may feel uncomfortable, we may be tempted to be blinded by the mood of our society which does not like such statements. We may feel more comfortable with Jesus as the good moral teacher, but our text will not let us see him this way, he is more, much more. The passage almost shouts at us to see past other religious heroes to see Jesus and Jesus alone. He is God's Son, his chosen one. That is how we are to see him, not to be bedazzled by the idea, but dazzled, amazed by the reality.

Listen to Jesus

Now of course it is a fine thing for a preacher to point people to Jesus, to appreciate who he is, to look past whatever prejudices or blindnesses any of us may have and see who he really is. This is a particularly good thing to do on a Sunday set aside as *Back to Church Sunday*. We would long for all who come to the Cathedral, or to any Church, to look to Jesus.

However if we leave things there we will not be doing justice to the passage. For God's voice does not say "This is my Son, my chosen, isn't he shiny!" Rather the command is listen to him. We are not just to admire Jesus as a religious ideal but we are to listen to him.

There is much we could consider as we think about listening to Jesus but there are some pointers here.

His Exodus

Firstly we can notice what Jesus, Moses and Elijah are talking about. It is translated here as his departure but it may be more helpful to leave it in the Greek which is *exodus*. With Moses present it is clear that what is being spoken of is a major salvation event which will be accomplished in upcoming events in Jerusalem, which will be like the great Exodus of old, bringing people to the promised land. This why Jesus proclaims Good News.

More could be said but listening to Jesus will mean listening to his plans of salvation and getting on board with them. Jesus is not only to be admired but we are to let his voice shepherd us to the Promised Land.

His Path

However Jesus has already spoken of the path that this salvation will take, it will be through pain, rejection and death before glory will come. It is this that his disciples find hard to hear, surely this glorious one would not follow such a path. They were bedazzled by the image of the glorious Messiah who would liberate Israel, kick out the Romans and bring in God's kingdom in which they would have plum posts. They were blind to the way of Christ.

The exodus, the great saving event in Jerusalem will not be one of military and political triumph, but humble and painful sacrifice.

Moreover Jesus calls on those who follow him to take the same path taking up their cross. If we listen to Jesus our path is to be one of self denial.

We find this so hard, we prefer the idea of glory, of triumph, following the shiny saviour rather than the crucified Christ, and the temptation is always like that of Peter to want to keep the moments of glory going.

But if we are to listen to Jesus we are to follow his path of humility and self denial, knowing ultimately this is the way to glory as we walk by faith and not by sight.

His Prayers

Lastly as we look at this dazzling passage it is easy to forget where it started.

If we are to listen to Jesus we need to listen to him at prayer. If we are to follow his path of self denial, of humble faith there is no better place to start than on our knees. There will be probably be no moment of transfiguration, we may struggle at times to stay awake, but it is good for us to be there.