

Sunday before Lent 2015 St Marylebone 11 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

At the 8.30 am celebration of Holy Communion according to the *Book of Common Prayer* earlier this morning, the congregation heard the story of Jesus telling his disciples that he was about to be handed over to the Gentiles, that he would be scourged, ill-treated, put to death and that he would rise again.

That story, of course, precedes the Gospel reading we have just heard. But the two stories belong together and together they form part of a vitally important continuous narrative as Jesus journeys, for the final time, to Jerusalem.

St Luke makes no bones about it, Jesus' disciples do not understand a word of what he has said to them. And why should they have been able to make any sense of Jesus' talk of betrayal and death and resurrection?

To us, who know the whole story of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, Jesus' words make perfect sense.

We know that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, that he was crucified, that he died and was buried and that, on the third day, he rose again.

We rehearse the story of divine salvation over and over and over again.

But to those who first heard Jesus' painful and prophetic words, they could and did mean nothing?

So Jesus, after talking about all that lay ahead for him in Jerusalem, takes the three disciples who are closest to him, those who have been present at every moment of his unfolding divine manifestation, up to Mount Tabor, and there, they are confronted with Jesus in a way that they had never seen nor experienced before.

Jesus, the Galilean carpenter, is transfigured in front of them and revealed as the Christ, the long-promised and eagerly-awaited Messiah in God's glory.

In the company of Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, the three disciples hear a voice, as if from heaven, saying, *"This is my beloved Son on whom my favour rests; listen to him"*.

Into their already troubled confusion and searching

speculation as to what Jesus words to them before they climbed the mountain might have meant, comes a momentary foretaste not only of what really is and what has always been, but of what shall be for ever.

Understandably, Peter, James and John want to hold on to this brief moment of divine epiphany - in which everything seems to fall into place - and treasure it for ever.

Understandably, Peter, James and John want to construct a shelter, build something, somewhere to root and anchor this supranormal experience in the tangible realities of stones and tree branches; something, somewhere where they can root and anchor this profound experience in a particular time and place.

All too understandably, Peter, James and John want to reach out and touch and hold onto this fleetingly granted foretaste of Paradise for ever.

All too soon, all too quickly, the moment passes; Moses and Elijah are gone, and Jesus, having been revealed as the Christ in the glory of his Father, is once again Jesus the Carpenter from Nazareth leading them down from the mountain.

And as if to underline the transience of the moment, when Jesus and his companions reach the plain at the mountain's base, they are immediately thrust into another all-too-common everyday experience of suffering and despair.

From time to time, by God's grace, we too are granted fleeting precious moments of epiphany when it seems as if heaven itself is torn apart and everything suddenly makes perfect sense; moments when all things fall into their right place; moments when doubts seem to be answered and we know that God is very near to us.

But, just like Peter and James and John, we are not permitted to live on Mount Tabor for ever: to capture and imprison such moments and live forever in their embrace; like the disciples, we too have to return to the everyday lives we inhabit, lives full of doubt and pain and mystery, but we do so in the ever-present company of Jesus.

Like the disciples, our moments of divine epiphany, if or when they come, will always be over too quickly and all too soon we shall have to return to what might be the all too painful realities, confusions and doubts of daily life.

On Wednesday of this week, we shall enter the holy season of Lent and, through its forty days, the Church asks us to give more attention to our walk with Jesus: to find more time for listening out for God's quiet call in our lives; to provide ourselves with more opportunities for opening our eyes and truly perceiving God's glory - even in the most unlikely of places; to revisit the precious glimpses of divine glory we might already have experienced in our journeying along the Way, in our journeying accompanied by Christ, not only on the mountain tops but on the plain.

Amen.