

Sweet clarity

Sermon for the Sunday before Lent, 2nd March 2025

Holy Communion at 8.30am

Readings [2 Corinthians 3.12–4.2](#) [Luke 9.28-43](#)

If you have to speak in public, it's good (as the Guides and Scouts say) to Be Prepared. Prepare too far in advance, however, and things may change in the meantime. I held off writing this sermon until Thursday evening at the White House had happened. Phew, I thought, I can begin with some line like 'a stormer from Starmer'. But after Thursday came Friday, and Mr Zelensky's turn in the Oval Office, and a press conference that turned into a scene from *The Godfather*.

Will we look back on that evening as the moment when the world tilted on its axis? That partly depends on the meeting our Prime Minister is chairing today with leaders from the rest of Europe and beyond. We must pray for him and for everyone who will be in the room where it happens. But what should we pray for?

St Paul this morning talks about a veil being removed from the eyes, having clarity, so you can see clearly how things are, who you are dealing with, and what is at stake. If you agree that that clarity is what is needed, then the gospel reading is also very fitting – though, on the face of it, it could not be more different from the meeting that will take place a couple of miles away today. It's not a story is not about leaders gathering in a grand venue, it is about four friends climbing a hill – but the story is all about clarity.

Peter, James and John have no doubt been impressed by Jesus – that's why they have left their old lives to take to the road and follow him as disciples – but now, in a vision on the hilltop, they see clearly who they are dealing with, how things are, and what is at stake. They see him with Moses and Elijah – Moses, who led their ancestors to freedom, and Elijah, giant among the prophets who dare to speak for God – they see that in Jesus they are dealing with a person who touches the deepest longings of their people.

And when they come down the mountain again, and encounter a father and son in deepest distress, the clarity of the mystic moment on the hilltop is down here too. They see clearly that Jesus is someone who lives in two worlds, both with Moses and Elijah, and now with this desperate parent and child; the world of God's glory and the world of human pain and fear. Somehow in him the two worlds come together.

Jesus, then, is a person for them to get to know – and for us too, so that we may live in the real world, but do it as people who also know the real presence of God. And do it with clarity, with our eyes open.

I hope you have managed to be prepared for pancake production on Tuesday. After Shrove Tuesday comes Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent, a season of forty-odd days, recalling Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, getting clarity before he started his ministry. It is a time to realise how the stuff life serves up can obscure our vision, make us lose sight of deep things; a time to let God help us see clearly again. Lent traditionally involves three kinds of giving: giving time, giving up and giving away.

- Giving time – clearing space in life for praying and reading the Bible. Why? So that you can see more clearly who God is.
- Giving up – choosing for a while not to eat, or drink or do something. Why? So that you can see more clearly what matters most, what is truly indispensable.
- Giving away – supporting a cause that meets human need. Why? So that you can see more clearly what it means to love your neighbour.

What might we do? There are lots of ways of doing Lent, but here are three suggestions.

Giving time – can you give an hour at 7.30pm on a Tuesday for a free online event led by Bishop Sarah and our other London bishops? It's called *Climate Justice & Discipleship*. Each week we shall look at a moment in Jesus' life and ministry and how it might help us in our overheating world to live less from fear and more from love. Details [here](#).

Giving up – is there something you feel you need a break from; perhaps something you don't actively choose to do but often end up doing? For me, I think Lent is going to be about giving up YouTube shorts.

Giving away – for the last couple of years we have tried to strengthen our links with the Anglican church in Tanzania through a Lent appeal for Murgwanza hospital in Kagera. Last year we raised money for a biochemistry analyser. This year it is for a list of equipment for the labour ward, so that childbirth can be safer and a bit less uncomfortable.

Thomas Shavu from Kagera, who has visited us here and whose daughter was born in the hospital, tells us, 'The listed equipment is essential – not just a wish. It will truly help save lives.' Details [here](#).

When we reach the end of Lent and come to Easter, what will be different? We probably won't have cracked the climate crisis or the other fearful things around us – though, please God, the people of Ukraine may be in a better place than they are now.

What may be different will be us – perhaps a little different, perhaps a lot. We may have begun to see more clearly: to have more clarity about ourselves; more clarity about the world, both the cunning and the truth that St Paul writes about this morning; and more clarity about God, about how to live eyes open in the world as it is, and still glimpse the glory of God.