



**THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY
NEXT BEFORE LENT
14 FEBRUARY 2021**

Biblical musings

II Kings 2:1-12, II Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

Resisting the temptation to say something about S. Valentine, I thought I might comment on today's three lessons.

In the first, from the second book of Kings, we have the story of Elijah's translation into heaven, with its fiery chariots and horses, witnessed by Elisha. Although Elisha, having seen the translation, and so proved himself to be worthy of following on from Elijah as his successor, indeed receiving a 'double share' of Elijah's spirit, one is always left with feeling a sense of anti-climax in that Elisha's prophetic period never quite matched the significance of Elijah's. It was Elijah whose return came to be expected by the Jews as a preparation for the coming of the messiah, and it is Elijah, therefore, who appears in today's gospel reading. One thing I note particularly about this passage of scripture is the repetitive use of the three-fold device, in this case of the visits to the prophetic communities first at Bethel, then at Jericho and finally at the Jordan. Whether this is historically accurate, or a way of building up tension in the narrative I do not know, but it certainly is effective. This three-fold device occurs in story-telling in many different traditions, but two other biblical examples come to mind, in the call of Samuel, when he does not recognise the voice of the Lord, but thinks it is the voice of his teacher, Eli (I Samuel 3:2-10), and (John 21: 15-19) the three times that Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. Although in this case the three-fold question loses some of its impact because English has only the one word for 'love', nevertheless it still retains force by the insistence of the repetition.

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth in the second lesson says that the gospel is 'veiled', which is an uncomfortable concept, smacking, as it does, of the Gnostic idea of some sort of secret knowledge that only the initiated know about. This might be fine if we like the idea of being inside a cosy club, but it is far from the inclusive picture of God that I would most like to advocate. I should, however, have read further, because Paul goes on to explain that it is those who have decided to follow 'the god of this world' who have had their eyes blinded to the true light of Christ. I think most of us know that it is easy to become so engrossed in everyday affairs that one does not have either time or inclination to look into the true heart of things. Even in this current plague-time, when some of us have time on our hands (whilst others are rushed off their feet), it is still possible to get so wrapped up in gloomy news, or fly off into escapist pursuits, that one has no inclination to seek for the things of God. In fact, I think I may be writing these notes now precisely to try to focus more on those things!

That brings me to the gospel reading today, and the story of the Transfiguration. I always associate this with the chapel at Selwyn College, Cambridge because the Feast of the Transfiguration falls on 6 August, which always used to be during the week of the annual summer course for Readers that was held there, and it featured greatly in our worship that day. The message of the Transfiguration is that Jesus, the human being, is, at the same time, the Son of God. It came as an overwhelming surprise to Peter at least, and he started gibbering, but it stands as a reminder to us that the Jesus whom we feel we know is also God himself, so we truly stand on hallowed ground when we come to him. In these quite dark, wintry plague days I find some comfort in that thought.

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