



SECOND SUNDAY LENT 2006

Genesis 22:1-18 Romans 8:31-34 Mark 9: 2-10

The first eight chapters of Mark present a sort of “getting to know” Jesus. This reaches a high point with the questions, “Who do people say that I am?” “Who do you say that I am?”

Mark has established Jesus as healer and exorcist. He has also hinted at a “more than” quality in the controversies with the authorities.

Jesus is a faithful servant of God and this designation carries an element of suffering.

As Mark’s narrative continues, the shadow of the cross emerges. Following the first suggestion of the suffering to come we are given the story of the transfiguration.

There are different ways to understand this story and each of the evangelists has used it for his own purpose. For Mark, the story is placed as a balance to the suffering that will follow.

The words Mark uses to tell the story point to an understanding of the event as a mystical, but not an unreal experience.

The outline of the narrative is well known. Jesus led Peter, James and John up a high mountain. The initiative comes from Jesus. The disciples saw him in a new way that defied description.

They also saw Moses and Elijah in conversation with Jesus. This phrase “in conversation with” is an important element of the story and would have had particular meaning for the community.

God is the subject of Scripture. The Jews understood that Scripture was both speech about God (theos-logos), and Israel’s testimony that God had spoken.

In this account we see Jesus as part of Israel’s testimony. Jesus is part of the traditional utterance about God. Jesus is also confirmation that God has spoken. Peter expresses what they all feel. It is good to be witness to the vision. It is also an expression of awe and wonder.

This is a peak experience. We know from our own story the importance

of such moments in our lives when everything seemed perfect. The experience is like striking a match in the darkness. For a brief time we see clearly. These glimpses of “rightness” are accompanied by the longing to cling to the moment for ever.

The final act is the appearance of the cloud, the sign of the presence of God. At baptism the words of God are, “You are my beloved son, on you my favour rests.” Here we are now told, “Listen to him”.

In the light of the “conversation” we are told that the testimony of Jesus has the authority of God.

Why does the church link this story with the testing of Abraham? The stories of Abraham are promise stories. We have a picture of a faithful father who continues to believe in God’s word in the face of great difficulty. For the story to continue, there must be an inheritor of the dream.

Isaac, the son, is a gift from God. When God’s requests the return of the gift, Abraham faces the ultimate challenge to his fidelity. For the promise to be realized, the son must live.

In reflecting on the death of Jesus, the old story is a reminder that the promise of the new covenant will continue even in and through death. The beloved son is the inheritor of the vision in a new and unique way.

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