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**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**

**SUNDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2021 – SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE LENT**

**COLLECT**

Almighty Father,

whose Son was revealed in majesty

before he suffered death upon the cross:

give us grace to perceive his glory,

that we may be strengthened to suffer with him

and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

**Ps 50.1-6**

1 The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken ♦

and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth; ♦

our God comes and will not keep silence.

3 Consuming fire goes out before him ♦

and a mighty tempest stirs about him.

4 He calls the heaven above, ♦

and the earth, that he may judge his people:

5 ‘Gather to me my faithful, ♦

who have sealed my covenant with sacrifice.’

6 Let the heavens declare his righteousness, ♦

for God himself is judge.

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**2 Cor 4.3-6**

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**Mark 9.2-9**

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

**Reflection – this week from Mary-Lou**

Allan and I are back into jigsaws. Almost all of last week was taken up with a beautiful picture of the nativity. It took ages because - apart from the glorious star shining directly onto Mary and Baby Jesus - the rest was made up of barely differing shades of dark brown. The light at the heart of the stable made the centre so clear – the rest was a real struggle.

On the mountain top, Peter, James and John had that extraordinary experience. Suddenly, there was Jesus, their friend, their Master, shining in his true glory, dazzling white – and with him they saw those two towering figures, Elijah and Moses, the three of them talking together. And as if that wasn’t enough, they suddenly sense the cloud of God’s glory and God’s voice: *This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him*. The sheer intensity of the Light of Christ irradiates the whole encounter – this is God’s Son! As the voice ends, they look up - and suddenly Jesus is once more there alone.

No wonder the disciples struggle to make sense of it all! In the blink of an eye they are caught up in the most profound religious experience, receiving the affirmation of the true glory and identity of the Holy One - the ‘*Son, the Beloved*.’ No wonder they wanted to hold onto the moment somehow! That, in a way, was the easy bit – like the light from the star in our jigsaw, throwing Mary and the Baby into clarity of colour and form, all is clear, all is bright, all is wonder and assurance.

But why do you think the Voice thundered that command: Listen to him? Where there is intensity of light, we also find deep shadows, at the edge of the light. This reading follows straight after Jesus has just tried to teach the disciples about what is to come: that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be killed, before rising on the third day, but Peter didn’t want to hear it. Jesus tried to tell the disciples and the crowd around him that if they wanted to follow him, it meant life and death for them too.

Peter, James and John cannot stay on the mountain top with Jesus, basking in the light, re-living the wonder of that profound experience. They cannot just hang onto the excitement and spiritual high, as they try to make sense of it. They have to come back down the mountain. Back to their lack of faith and inability to see properly. Back down into the puzzling shadows and the threatening darkness. The have to hear what God said, they have to listen to Jesus, to what they don’t want to hear.

Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what they’ve seen. He knows it won’t make any sense to them until they’ve lived through what is to come in Jerusalem. For without accepting the truth of the darkness, the glory cannot be truly understood.

Back to the jigsaw: as we spent more and more time on the many, many dark brown pieces, we began to see that it was only where the dark bordered on the light, on the edges of the emerging picture, that we could begin to make sense of the painting and, very gradually, piece it together. We needed both the shadows and the light. That was the journey the disciples had to make too. It’s the same journey for us. As we approach Lent we learn that we have – somehow! – to hold together both the darkness Christ will face, and the Light. For it is only when we struggle with this reality, this seeming paradox, that we will grope our way towards understanding, as we walk with Jesus and listen to him.

When we knew we must be getting to the end of our jigsaw, we were still struggling with the brown bits that were left, and suddenly realised – there was one missing! After searching the floor in vain, and then being cross for a bit, I had an idea. Late that night, I delved into the pocket of a jacket I’d been wearing two days before – and there it was: the missing piece, that – finally! – made sense of it all and completed the picture. Maybe on the evening of the third day, after all they’d witnessed in recent days, Peter, James and John remembered the missing piece that could made sense of it all. On that mountain top, caught up in glory and truth.