



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2024- SUNDAY 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.

Psalm 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. [R]

2 Kings 2.1-12

Elijah Ascends to Heaven

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?' And he said, 'Yes, I know; keep silent.'

Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?' And he answered, 'Yes, I know; be silent.'

Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Mark, chapter 9, verses 2-9.

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel and it is introduced with an Acclamation, as below:

Alleluia! **Alleluia!**

Your word is truth, O Lord: consecrate us in the truth.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Mark, chapter 9 verses 2-9.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

The Transfiguration

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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 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.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

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.

A Reflection from Hannah...

Elijah's life was certainly unconventional! Amongst other things, he had an almighty miracle-off with the prophets of Baal (and won); he was hidden by God and fed by ravens and he even brought a little boy back to life. He was a prophet who became the stuff of folklore, and it's clear as we notice the formulaic repetition in this week's reading that stories of his life and times formed a lively aural tradition. They would have been told, again and again, down the centuries- probably with some embellishment for good effect. In this excerpt from the second book of Kings, Elijah seems to have a scheduled Ascension Day- common knowledge amongst his fellow prophets- and it is on this day that we find him with Elisha, his successor, travelling to Jericho.

As they go on to the river Jordan, Elijah makes the waters part and then, quite all of a sudden, he is taken up into heaven, shrouded in chariots and horses of fire. What we don't read, but happens next, is that Elijah's mantle (his coat) lands on Elisha, who then uses it to part the river Jordan again- so the baton has been passed on.

There are a few Old Testament characters who either have mysterious deaths, or don't seem to die at all. Elijah and Enoch were both 'taken up' into heaven. Moses, whilst he did die, was buried in an unknown location- so the story wasn't quite completed. Would they return? Much later, in the book of Malachi (chapter 4, verse 5), we hear a promise about Elijah:

'See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.'

So in Jesus' time people were waiting for this great prophet to reappear. Indeed, John the Baptist was recorded as Elijah back again. So there would have been a preparedness about the possibility of encountering Elijah, and what this might mean. In the account of the transfiguration the clues are there. As Peter, James, John and Jesus ascended the mountain they were recalling the very concept of ascension- an intriguing part of Elijah's story, and of Moses as he went up Mount Sinai to receive the Law. Then, when the moment of glory comes, and Christ is seen transfigured and alongside Moses and Elijah, the heady notes of those ancient tales were likewise transfigured. The presence of Elijah was both a sign that the day of the Lord was coming, and a representative of the prophetic tradition. The presence of Moses represented the Law. Both the law and the prophets given into the hands of Jesus.

And so here, as we see again and again, Christ brings all things together. Two different strands of Hebrew practice were rolled into one in the person of Jesus. As we, in our little moments and much less dramatic circumstances, think about all that divides us from one another and within ourselves, we can pray to Jesus the great reconciler- in whom nothing is divided, and who, in his transfiguring, transforming love, brings all things into one.