

Living the Way of Jesus Week 11

'Faith Gets Difficult'

Bible Passage: Mark 9:2-29

In Mark chapter 8, Jesus asked this question of his disciples: 'Who do you say I am?' Despite Peter's immediate response that Jesus was the Messiah, there follows a series of incidents in chapters 9 and 10 that imply that all of the disciples are still struggling to fully understand the identity and mission of Jesus. By the end of chapter 10, it is Bartimaeus alone – the man who is physically blind – who demonstrates the greatest depth of spiritual insight.

Read Mark 9:2-13

- What stands out for you as you read this passage?
- What does this incident, known as 'the transfiguration', tell us about Jesus?
- What does it tell us about the disciples? (NB. In a Jewish worldview, Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the Prophets. The two together are the ways in which God spoke to his people in the past about how they were to follow and obey him.)
- Mark's comment in (9:6) implies that Peter has made a mistake. In suggesting that they erect three shelters side by side, why has Peter got this wrong? Compare this with Peter's claims in (8:29) and (8:31-33).
- Compare (9:7) with (1:11). Why do you think God the Father repeats this affirmation at this point in the story?
- The Greek word used here for 'listen' means 'to listen, to understand, and to put into practice' ie. 'to hearken', to use an old fashioned word. How can we put this into practice in our lives today?
- In what ways is our worship today compromised by an inadequate view of Jesus?
- How can we be sure we are giving Christ the glory he deserves? Consider timing, place, space, familiarity with the Scriptures, listening – all of which are mentioned in this passage – along with the centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection (9:9-10).
- Why are all of these aspects so crucial both to our own identity as Christians, and also to the Christian message that we share with those who do not know him?

Mark now contrasts the mountain top experience with the argument going on at the foot of the hill.

Read Mark 9:14-29

- Jesus has already referred to both his own death, and to the sufferings of John the Baptist, who is the Elijah of the New Testament. (9:12-13) We now find a group of seven of Jesus' disciples struggling. Does any of this resonate with difficulties that you have with your faith?
- In (9:17-18) we have the first recorded 'failure' for the disciples. Why do you think this has happened? How far do you think that the working of the Holy Spirit is dependent on our prayer lives? (9:28-29)
- Now look at the faith of the man who asks for healing for his son. (9:21-27) It is summarised in his heartfelt cry, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.' (9:24) Is this response sometimes your cry too?
- In his book 'Help my Unbelief', Barnabas Piper says, 'Christians who don't know the tension of 'I believe; help my unbelief' may not be Christians at all, or at the least they might be very infantile ones. Our faith is one of brutal tensions.' How far do you agree with him?
- Think of ways in which we can help our unbelief by learning to listen more closely to Jesus.

Finally

Spend some time in silence listening to Jesus.

Share together what comes out of this, and pray into it.