

Evensong readings:-

Ezekiel ch.20, vv1-8,33-44

Acts ch.20, vv1-17

Gospel: Mark ch.8, vv27-end.

by

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This weekend we continue in the company of Ezekiel, the Book of Acts, the second part of Luke's Gospel, and the Gospel according to Mark. Ezekiel continued to berate the Jews for their constant waywardness, although he uses much stronger language. In fact he summarises the calling to faith followed by the usual loss of commitment, and the greater one to the delights of the flesh, wealth and idolatry. Nothing changes, does it?

In the Book of Acts, the second part of Luke's Gospel, the events of Paul's third journey are unfolded. He visited Asia Minor and Greece, and preached at many places, but he felt a call to Jerusalem. Luke was with him and his other companions, and must have witnessed the miracle of restoring Eutychus to life, having fallen several floors into the road beneath. While Paul was able to travel and preach, as he had on his three journeys, meeting with opposition at various times and in various ways, Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish world. Here was the Sanhedrin, which had opposed and eventually killed Jesus, a city occupied and ruled by Rome.

Mark's reading relates the event at Caesarea Phillippi, familiar to most of us, when Jesus challenged his disciples. He had taught, explained and persuaded them to follow him, but he had never explained who he was, and so far as we know, he was never asked. No doubt they thought that he was a very gifted rabbi – a teacher of faith. Nobody appears to have asked the question. So it was remarkable that Simon Peter should conclude that this young man, who knew and could explain the inexplicable, was different. Simon was a man who could reach a conclusion quite quickly – after all he appeared to be the leader and was used to dealing with people selling the fish that the cousins caught.

So he spoke, and he was right. Jesus was delighted that he had realised who he was. He was not so delighted subsequently at Simon's well-meant "big brother" declaration, which completely missed the point. It was one thing to recognise the divinity and authority of Jesus, but it was an entirely different matter to understand the purpose of God's transformation as Jesus.

It has been thought that much of Mark's Gospel comes from his notes and memories of his time with Peter in Rome. Currently however, this theory is not supported so well by experts. The concentration on Peter, out of the 12 principal disciples – for there were surely others as well who supported and gave them hospitality – does tend to support a Petrine source for part of the Gospel. He was given authority by Jesus, which exposed his weaknesses, and it is, I feel sure, why we are so familiar with Peter's faux pas, especially his cowardice at the Crucifixion.



On Monday we celebrate Holy Cross Day, (or presumably Holy Crawss Day at Oxford University?). It recalls the exhibition of the supposed Cross of Jesus' Crucifixion in Jerusalem in 629, retrieved from the Persians. I am never sure about celebrations that seem to belong to the penumbra of the Christian faith. No doubt some people once felt that it was important, and of course the instrument of Jesus Christ's appalling suffering and death commands respect of a sort. If it was that Cross. However, the Cross is important to us as a symbol of Christian faith, and for so many who have chosen to set that symbol as the object of their lives, as did the Disciples in their way, both priests and laity, the Royal Priesthood that Peter speaks to us about.

Illustration: The calling of Peter and Andrew by Caravaggio

AMEN