

Glory in the Grey

Luke 9 v18 – 36

It is an understatement to say that we are living in very uncertain times. It feels like we are living in days that are very grey. That we are in the midst of a storm. Not only the overcast skies, but the many unknowns that the world is facing at this time.

For two years we have been battered with Covid, and now we are facing the prospect of a war, a war which no one in their right minds wants! A war which will have significant consequences for everyone.

How long will this last? What are the consequences? Do we want our children and grandchildren brought up in the shadow of war? How will the economy be affected? What will happen to all the displaced people? Will it escalate further? How many lives will be lost? What is the future of the other countries near Ukraine where Soviet influence was strong?

These are all very grey areas, and the truth is we have no answers for those questions right now. The inherent nature of not knowing creates additional stress and adds to fear. Many of us will be activists and desire to get in there and sort it out immediately. If only it was that easy.

Today in our Gospel readings we meet with Jesus en route to his passion. His world had become very grey. There is much talk on the journey with the Disciples of the cross and his death.

I believe that Jesus felt the impact of the cross, even as a young lad.

He knew well what crucifixion meant.

When he was just a boy, eleven years old, there was a rebellion by Judas the Galilean against Rome. It happened only four miles from his home town of Nazareth, when Judas the Galilean raided the royal armoury. The vengeance was swift and sudden. The homes of those who rebelled were burned to the ground, their inhabitants sold into slavery and two thousand of the rebels were crucified on crosses which lined the roadside that they might be a dreadful warning to those tempted to rebel.

Jesus grew up under the shadow of those Roman crosses. Who knows the impact upon his young mind? Jesus would also become a rebel but his rebellion was all about love and not war. He chose a different path – God's path!

The price of rebellion would lead him to the cross, he knew this and this is what he told his followers, that his departure would be soon, and it would be on a Roman cross, and if they were to come and follow him, they must be prepared to take up their cross also and follow him.

Jesus said that he must go to the cross. It's interesting to note that many times in Luke's Gospel, Jesus said he must do something.

Over and over again he told the Disciples that he must go to the cross. He knew that he had a destiny to fulfil. God's will was his will. He had no other object but to do upon earth what God had sent him to do.

But he knew that the cross was the door to a better world.

George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, once offered these words of wisdom in his profound poem, *Glory in the Grey*.

Almighty God ...

Sun behind all suns,

Soul behind all souls ...

Show to us in everything we touch

And in everyone we meet

The continued assurance of thy presence round us,

Lest ever we should think thee absent.

In all created things thou art there.

In every friend we have

The sunshine of thy presence is shown forth.

In every enemy that seems to cross our path,

Thou art there within the cloud to challenge us to love.

Show to us the glory in the grey.

Awake for us thy presence in the very storm

Till all our joys are seen as thee

And all our trivial tasks emerge as priestly sacraments

In the universal temple of thy love.

How did Jesus deal with his grey moments?

That's what the Transfiguration is all about.

That's why they went up the Mount of Transfiguration – to pray.

Prayer brings a different understanding to every situation – prayer helps us to see things in a new light.

Today, in our challenging world, what can we do to make a difference? What can we do for Ukraine? How will our voice be heard?

In our readings today, we see how Jesus used his crisis and turned it into an opportunity to see that God was there within the cloud to challenge us to love.

To show to us the glory in the grey.

To awaken for him God's presence in the very storm

Till all his joys are seen...

One thing we can and should do for Ukraine is pray, bring this grey situation to God in prayer.

The disciples saw things that day on the mountain that few, if any mortals have ever seen. They saw a glimpse of eternity. They saw the sun behind the sun.

They saw beyond the cross. This was a resurrection moment before the Resurrection. They saw Jesus as they would see him three days after his cross.

They saw the appearance of his face shining and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning...How do you describe events beyond our understanding?

But one thing we do know is that this would have encouraged the Disciples,

It was as the cloud descended upon Jesus, in that moment of grey, that they were to hear the words, *"This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him"*.

God not only instructed Jesus, through Moses and Elijah, how to find his glory in the grey. He also gave the Disciples words to take back to their trivial tasks and see that all that they do has significant consequences in God's kingdom.

In their grey moment Jesus gave them a fresh glimpse of who he was and of what was to come!

Let us also take great comfort from this story today, in our grey moments, that there are good things laid up in store for all who would listen to and follow Christ.

In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, can we hear the voice of Jesus? Can we make room to meet with him and listen to his voice? What is he saying about this crisis?

His challenge to the disciples was this. Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am?

And that's the question that comes to us as we begin the journey to Easter? Who is Jesus for you? Is he real? Can he transform the darkest of moments? Is he interested in this war?

Is he walking with you in your dark valley? Is he in your pain as you see Him hanging from the cross? Is he with you as you climb the mountain of prayer and spend time with God?

The answer from the Gospels is Yes...Yes...Yes...He is...He understands, for he has been there!

This Wednesday we begin the journey of Lent, and this is always a time to see Jesus in a new light, to engage afresh with him, to know him in new and exciting ways.

But Jesus was not all about supernatural moments, more often than not he was in the valley of darkness, in the midst of people's problems and challenges!

In prayer let us together see past this potentially debilitating time of troubling uncertainty, indecision and insecurity. Let us find God's presence in the midst of these storms; feel his peace, know that holy sense of hope and purpose and ultimately, let us...emerge as in the words of George MacLeod, as priestly sacraments, in the universal temple of his love, as people ready to serve God to bring in his Kingdom.

We are all fascinated with a beautiful rainbow caused by reflection, refraction and dispersion of light in water droplets resulting in a spectrum of light appearing in the sky.

But rainbows are spiritual and so beautiful. A rainbow lights up the dark sky and gives us positive feelings of hope. There is glory in the grey when we see a rainbow!

There is glory in a rainbow.

A rainbow can lift our hearts and become a transfiguration moment for us.

The blind minister from Innellan, George Matheson, found glory in a rainbow. There is a famous line in his great hymn, *"I trace the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be."*

Of course, because was blind, George wasn't able to trace a rainbow with his physical eye, what he in fact wrote was *"I stand on the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain."* but a committee in Edinburgh changed his words to trace...they had missed what George was saying...He was prepared to stand on the promises of God and feel that the promise is not in vain.

Today my friends, in the midst of this crisis, listen to the voice of Jesus, and stand on his promise and know that they are not in vain, a better world is coming and God is in it.

Let us now sing those beautiful words...557 - *O love that wilt not let me go...*