

## LESSONS IN ENCOURAGEMENT

*And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Matthew 17:3*

In last week's Bible Class we touched on the humanity of our Lord. Would he have had to learn as we do? If he were put into a classroom today would he necessarily be labelled "gifted"?

We know that our Lord was certainly intelligent even according to his humanity. Even his enemies said "Never has a man spoken like this man". We know that when Jesus was a child of 12 he dazzled the doctors with the wisdom of his answers. But we know that Jesus had to learn. We know from Scripture that the child Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man". (Luke 2:52). To be fully human our Lord must have had the experience of learning and all the human frustrations connected with that process, yet without sin. To be fully human, the one his disciples called "Teacher" also had to remain a life-long "Student".

We can all find that fact of great comfort, especially as we so often struggle with learning a new skill whether it's social or technical. As we pray to our Lord for patience and wisdom we can be assured that he sympathizes with our human weaknesses. So often we're tempted to lose hope, maybe fall into despair or worse yet, resort to some destructive behaviour in our frustration: throw the book against the wall, drop the computer from the third floor window or escape it all through drink and drug or simply dropping out.

Our Lord, in his humanity, had to learn. Even at the age of 30, and having perfect communication with His Heavenly Father, he would have to struggle with his mission, in his humanity. His struggle is self-evident here for he "He took Peter, James and John and led them up on a high mountain by themselves". It's helpful to have Luke say "it was to pray" but Matthew probably thinks that detail self-evident. Jesus often retreated to spiritually prepare himself. He knew the need to find encouragement and strength in the fellowship of his brethren. Looking further ahead we him struggle in his humanity in embracing the cross. "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me, nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done". Then there was the angel strengthening him and the sweating of great drops of blood.

Clearly, just as the angel would strengthen our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, so also would messengers from heaven, Moses and Elijah be sent to strengthen him. How could they as men strengthen the Son of God? There is only one way. It is through the Word. And so Matthew records:

*... And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Matthew 17:3*

Luke is a bit clearer, adding detail concerning the nature of the discussions saying,

*They spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9:31*

Now the question arises in our minds concerning what Moses and Elijah might be saying. They represent the Law and the Prophets. What shall they say? Isn't it obvious?

It is if you read the language of the New Testament. They spoke of his departure which has as its underlying word, *exodus*. Now I've given some thought to the choice of that word. They could have said *death* or his *suffering* or even his *resurrection*. But they were speaking about his departure or *exodus*.

*Exodus*. Now that's a topic Moses knew something about first hand. He had received the call of God from the burning bush, through the Angel of the Lord.

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people,  
The children of Israel out of Egypt.

The Exodus from Egypt. Moses knew about leading the children of Israel in an exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. And Moses knew that someday God would raise up a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:18:

I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren,  
And will put My words in His mouth, and he shall speak to them all  
That I command Him.

We were talking about Bible Translations & Study editions this weekend. I like my NKJV because in the margins it has for prophetic verses open stars and coloured in stars. Deuteronomy 18:18 is an open star. It finds its fulfillment in Christ as recorded in John's Gospel observed Philip who shared the message with Nathanael:

We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the  
Prophets wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

And Moses, if he didn't have the fullest understanding before, would know at this meeting, how Jesus was his fulfilment – how Jesus was to be fulfilment of all his longings and the longings of his faithful children Israel. How he would encourage him! How he could encourage him with the Scriptures. Now Elijah was there also. ... How his ministry paralleled that of Moses. Illuminating the land with their sacrifices pointing towards the sacrifice to come. How both their ministries and lives paralleled that of our Lord. Incredible parallels there are between Moses, Elijah and Jesus.

Moses confronted soul-hardened Pharaoh. Elijah confronted the pure wickedness of Ahab. These were simply the henchmen of their boss. Jesus would confront the boss – Satan. Moses had his wilderness experience fleeing for his life. Likewise did Elijah. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to be concerned over his life with offers of bread by Satan, but he resisted it with the Word of God. Moses knew what it was to be miraculously feed by manna from heaven. Elijah was miraculously fed bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. Our Lord spoke of having "I have food to eat that you do not know about." "My food" he explained "is to do the will of him who sent me". Moses parted and then crossed the Red Sea. Elijah crossed the Jordan River in a miraculous way by rolling up his cloak and touching the waters. Jesus crossed the deep waters of human sin without sin and entered into the Promised Land of Heaven and promises to lead us all, even Moses and the Prophets to that place.

Moses and Elijah, at least in a small way could relate to the burdens of our Lord's ministry. When things got really rough they prayed for death. Jesus never reached the sin of despair but would pray "Father, if it be your will take this cup from me".

Moses and Elijah were there talking to Jesus. They were there in Glory. God the Father was moving Heaven to touch the Earth at that moment. The Communion of Saints. The consolation of the brethren. It is something we ought to long for also. The Communion of saints is something we have here at the Sacrament. Receiving the Sacrament shouldn't be like receiving some mere pill of immortality, although it does grant eternal life and the forgiveness of sins and strength to live the mission. It is the Communion of Saints. It is where heaven touches earth and overlaps it for a moment. This is what Jesus was partaking of.

Moses and Elijah showed Jesus the light at the end of the tunnel even as our Lord's Divine Glory began to radiate forth. Comfort

It remains a mystery how Jesus could be fully God in all power and yet, to the other extreme suffer the frailties and weaknesses of human flesh and yet without sin. What a sight to behold!

And through it all, God the Father breaks through the cloud also, as he had done before at Our Lord's Baptism. "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased". The Divine Plan of God was revealed throughout the span of history and yes, even beyond from the eternal heart of our Loving Father.

Peter wanted the moment to last forever "Let me build three tabernacles". But it was a temporary meeting of heaven. And as with our Sacrament, it is a temporary meeting, but powerful enough to give us strength to go back down the mountain into the mission field.

May you be strengthened today through God's Word & Sacrament. May we see the humanity of Our Lord and be consoled. He understands us truly. He knows what it is to learn as we learn. He knows the need to be encouraged as we need to be encouraged. He humbles himself to the means – the Communion of Saints. **May we also see the Divinity of Our Lord. God in flesh is made powerfully manifest today.** It is testified to by the three witnesses: Peter, James and John. Their testimony is recorded. "We did not follow cleverly devised **myths** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (1 Peter ).

Our Lord's two natures work in one person of the Son of God effecting our salvation. May we be truly comforted and in that comfort, inspired to follow him.

Amen.