

## Praying, not overwhelmed

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**Read: Luke 9: 28-43a**

*God beyond us, God near to us: grant us ears and hearts to listen for you amidst and beyond the clamour, that we may know ourselves loved and have courage to serve the world.*

**Amen.**

With crisis abounding in the world, our Bible reading from the gospel today is about taking time out from it. That is not the same as ignoring the world, but if we are to bring grace and wisdom and hope to bear in the world, and do so with resilience and perseverance, taking time out for reflection and prayer is part of our diet.

In so many ways that's why we're here this morning. We come to reflect and to pray. Especially at times when the troubles of the world risk becoming overwhelming, what we see in Jesus is a model of taking time out, for prayer, for reflection, for intentional time communing with God.

We have much to be concerned about in the world. Of course, much that we are concerned about - much that is in our 'circle of concern' - is well beyond our 'circle of influence'. And so it is good that we come together to share our concerns, and to pray, and to work out what is ours to influence, and what we can directly control.

And what we have some control over includes bringing ourselves and our concerns before God, and making sure that we hear God's call for us, and have our own lives transformed in God's spirit to respond with grace to our neighbours, as we can.

Jesus was surrounded by lots of demands, with lots of people who were seeking healing and teaching and a bunch of disciples who had their own mixed-up interpersonal dynamics. There was a lot going on around Jesus. But we hear very clearly in Luke's gospel that Jesus regularly took time out to have intentional time away from that; intentional time with God.

He would go up a mountain to pray. I'm not sure if his best praying was while he was walking or when he was sitting on a rock. Either way, there's an intentionality about it. And on this occasion that we hear about today, he takes three of his disciples with him.

Now, if you've ever found yourself falling asleep while trying to pray you're in good company, because that was the experience of even Jesus' first chosen disciples. It may also be a sign of needing more sleep, and looking after your sleep is rightly a part of dealing well with God's gift of your body.

This occasion on the mountain was not like Jesus' normal times of prayer. I think it's no coincidence that this (Transfiguration) is recorded as happening just as Jesus is starting to teach about the suffering that lies ahead. And this comes as a reminder for us, as much as for Jesus, that we do not need to go into suffering with just our own strength. In taking this intentional time with God, we hear a reminder of God's faithful love even as Jesus embarks on this part of the journey.

The reminder links back to Jesus' baptism. Because when Jesus was baptised the voice of God assured Jesus: you are my child, my beloved; I delight in you.

And that's before Jesus has gone and done anything in ministry. *Before* he starts in ministry, at baptism Jesus' life is grounded with the assurance from God: you are my child, my beloved, I delight in you.

When we baptise a child here (as we do today), the whole church effectively echoes those words of God for one we surround with love as they are blessed with the water: you are God's child; you are beloved; God delights in you. Even before you do anything, this we affirm even from the very beginning of your life: you are God's child; you are beloved; God delights in you.

And this is worth coming back to as adults, too. Because this is the starting place of God's relationship with us. It's not something we earn or need to crave – it's something we can be assured about, and can be the starting place for our intentional time with God.

And so indeed, on this mountain, these words from Jesus' baptism are echoed. Only this time the two disciples are reminded by God: this is my child, my beloved; listen to him.

Listen to him, as he takes you back down the mountain and back into the demands and challenges of life, with only the security of the knowledge of being God's child, being loved by God, being delighted in by God.

And that's worth a lot. In that security, Jesus is ultimately able to exchange a mountain top with Moses and Elijah for a hilltop and a cross between two thieves. He exchanges glowing white clothes for being stripped and beaten. He exchanges dazzling brightness for the sky turning black. And on the cross, it's in a Roman Centurion's voice that we hear the affirmation that 'this is the Son of God'.

That still lies many weeks ahead. Moses and Elijah talk about it with him; it's in Jesus' circle of concern. But lest that big story or the daily demands of life become too overwhelming, in this intentional time set aside for reflection and prayer comes the reminder: you are God's child; God loves you; God delights in you.

And so Jesus can go down and deal with the individual needs before him, the neighbours on his path.

And so from this mountain, we can be better placed to face the demands of the world and deal with those things which are ours to do, for the sake of the good of our neighbours.

This is Jesus' story, and it's ours.

Thanks be to God.