

High Street Uniting Church Frankston

Listen to Him!

Mark 9:2 - 9



A couple of weeks ago we were looking at the issue of authority. When Jesus preaches in the synagogue at Capernaum, the people respond, “A new teaching and with authority!” Leaving us with the question; “Where is authority in this day and age?” And our scripture for today, even though we’ve jumped 7 chapters, leaves us with the same question; “Who do we listen to in this day and age?”

Jesus was metamorphosed before their eyes, his clothing becoming dazzling white and there appeared to be Elijah and

Moses talking with Jesus. And the voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son; listen to him!” This is a story filled with symbols and references to old stories and those symbols can be misleading. Yes, this is a mountaintop encounter with God and both Moses and Elijah had mountaintop encounters with God, but the deeper symbol is that Moses is the giver of the Law and Elijah is THE prophet. The voice from the cloud is saying, “The Law and the Prophets are standing in front of you, listen to Jesus”. Not, “Instead of the Law and the Prophets; listen to Jesus”, but “To fully understand God’s Word in the Law and the Prophets; listen to Jesus.”

Much as we might like it to be, so we can have a great celebration of Jesus’ revelation, this is not a stand-alone story. The opening, ‘six days later’, is a bit of a distraction. This is a continuation of the encounter on the road to Caesarea Phillipi, “Who do people say that I am?” Peter’s answer – “You are the Messiah” – leads to Jesus discussing the role and place of the Messiah. He tells them that the Messiah is to suffer and die and rise again. And the disciples don’t get it; Peter rebukes Jesus for saying he’s going to suffer and die. Hence, the voice from the cloud – clearly God – says, “Listen to Him!” Don’t just listen to Moses and the Law. Don’t just listen to the prophets call for faith and justice. Don’t just listen to the popular interpretations of Law and Prophecy. Listen to Jesus to hear God’s will for both law and justice, for both history and prophecy, for both grace and hard truth.

The Pharisees of Jesus day honestly saw obedience to the Law as the only path to saving the people. In the face of Greek and Roman occupation, the only way to preserve a Jewish identity was obedience to the Law in all aspects of life. But in the intense focus on the Law, they missed the faith and love that was at the heart of the Law. They missed the call of the prophets to centre life on God. Just as the Sadducees, with their strict focus on the Temple and laws around sacrifice and worship missed the call of the prophets to justice and mercy instead of sacrifice. It’s not that Moses was wrong, and Elijah was right; it was Elijah that called the people back to the Law and faith of Moses. It’s that there is a need for balance, for understanding the love of God that calls you to obey the Law and the mercy and justice in the Law that calls you to the faithfulness of God. And that is the revelation of God in Jesus the Christ that we see across all the stories of Jesus. He followed the Law but tempered that following with justice and mercy and the understanding that the heart of the Law is love. Jesus showed compassion in healing people but then sent them to the priests to obey the

Law. What we might see as tension between Law and Prophets is, actually, two sides of the same coin that is the will of God.

The tension between Law and Prophets continues right down to our society, even in people who have no idea who Moses or Elijah are or those who think prophets tell the future. The current media obsession with youth crimes shows this tension. On the one hand are those who think only in terms of Law, and understand justice only in terms of punishment and retribution; "Lock them up; why are we handing out bail?" And on the other hand, are those who understand justice is about both sides of a story and want to talk about living conditions, generational trauma, education, youth activities and rehabilitation programs. The followers of Law seem to think only in terms of the victims, and the followers of justice seem to think only in terms of the perpetrators. And who do we listen to? We listen to Jesus who recognises the seriousness of crime and sin but who also knows the power of forgiveness and the call to repentance. We listen to Jesus who speaks with compassion and empathy while also saying, "Sin no more".

Jesus' revelation of the path of the Messiah was not some totally new direction for God, the Law and the Prophets both speak of the need for drastic action to call people back to God. Again, that is why both Moses and Elijah are talking with Jesus on that mountain. Not in contradiction but to show the disciples that Jesus' way is the way of the Law and the Prophets. The path of the Messiah was both suffering and exultation - two sides of the same coin of the will of God. We can talk of the wonderful grace of God that welcomes all into the kingdom, but we need to remember the high cost of that grace in the cross. We can hold people to the seriousness of their behaviour, particularly as it may affect the community, but we need to remember the call to compassion and forgiveness.

To whom do we listen? We listen to Jesus, the One who is the Word of God. The One who holds the will of God in the Law and Prophets together. The One who calls us to see that justice and mercy are not weakness and that righteousness is a serious matter. We listen to Jesus, because, as Peter puts it, "Only you have the words of life."