

<sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here

*Luke 9:28*

1 The Lord is king: let the | peoples | tremble; ♦

*Psalm 99:1*

It is funny how things can come into your mind. Like when you are reading something – you suddenly think of something apparently quite unrelated, and it can set a whole train of thoughts going. That sort of thing happened to me this week as I was reading over the lessons appointed for this Sunday and, in particular, the psalm and Gospel appointed for this morning, the Sunday before Lent.

Take the opening verse of Psalm 99

1 The Lord is king: let the | peoples | tremble; ♦

My mind was suddenly back in Trinity, in a Senior Freshman Maths Class in Mechanics being taken by Professor Spearman. He was recommending a book by the Hungarian mathematician, Cornelius Lanczos. Lanczos was one of a number of eminent Jewish mathematicians invited to leave Europe and come to Dublin to work in the newly established Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies by Eamon De Valera just before the outbreak of the Second World War. At the beginning of each chapter of the book, Lanczos had chosen an appropriate text from the Old Testament. At the beginning of the last chapter, when his treatment of Mechanics was coming to a conclusion, he had chosen as his text ‘Shake off thy shoes from off thy feet. For the place whereupon thou standest is holy ground.’

I would just ask you to hold that text in your mind as we go through our thoughts this morning.

‘Shake off thy shoes from off thy feet. For the place whereupon thou standest is holy ground.’

To return to our Gospel reading, the account given to us by Luke of Jesus transfigured before them on the mountain. Luke gives us a picture of his disciples experiencing him in a totally different way, conversing with Moses and Elijah. Peter says, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here.’ he did not understand what was going on. However he had a profound realisation that he was in the presence of, indeed part of, something that went beyond his comprehension. While he did not comprehend, he knew – he was standing on holy ground.

This morning we are standing at the beginning of Lent, the beginning of a season of reflection and preparation for the season of Holy Week and Easter. We are invited on a journey into the mystery of Christ. What does it mean to talk of Jesus as Son of God, Son of Man? Why is this man who lived 2000 years ago so important to us now? Why does what he said then have any bearing on my life now? What is the meaning of his death? What do we understand by resurrection? I use the word mystery not as a cop-out but as a realisation that whatever I do understand, there is always more to grasp. I think this is what Paul was thinking about when he wrote to that bunch of enthusiasts in Corinth who felt they had all the answers:

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

*1 Cor 13:9ff*

One of my lecturers in Divinity whom I remember with particular affection is Professor Vokes who lectured us in New Testament. I often think back to one day when some of the class were trying to tie him down on some obscure point. He leaned back against the wall and grinned at us and said, ‘Gentlemen, sometimes the most honest thing I can say is that I don’t know.’ Sometimes we need to rest in our unknowing, to acknowledge that ‘we stand on holy ground’, to still the clamour of our debating and let God speak into our hearts.

Today, at our 11 o’clock service we are celebrating the sacrament of Baptism as Ross and Gillian bring their son Jamie for Baptism. Baptism is one of the two Gospel sacraments. In Baptism the child is drawn into the Body of Christ, is drawn into the redemptive love of God as shown forth in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the words of the Pastoral Introduction to this service:

Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love.

Michael Ramsey, who was Archbishop of Canterbury, when I first began to explore the faith in which I had been baptised, used to talk of the whole of his Christian life as being lived in response to his Baptism; in response to the Christ who lived, who died, who rose again, who lies at the heart of our Baptism.

For Ross and Gillian this is the beginning of a journey of a lifetime. Who knows what lies ahead for this child in the days and weeks and months and years to come? In a very real sense we stand on holy ground. In the name of this child we undertake to come to Christ, to submit to Christ, to turn to Christ. That in itself is the journey of a lifetime as we discover in daily living, in the

issues we face, the problems we encounter, what it is to say ‘Yes’ to the God we see in the person of his Son, who loved us and gave himself for us.

‘Shake off thy shoes from off thy feet. For the place whereupon thou standest is holy ground.’