

Meditation **“Crossing Over”**

Today, sisters and brothers, we are crossing over. Crossing over from one season to another: from the end of Epiphany to the beginning of Lent. We are crossing over the river with Elisha. And we’re crossing over that threshold from a mountaintop experience of Jesus’ transfiguration to descend into the valley below.

In these stories, there was a challenge to overcome: the disciples’ steep mountain to climb, and Elisha’s journey he really didn’t want to take. Then after the ascent, there’s a big event: bright lights and whirlwinds; a threshold moment where everything changes. And then comes the invitation to step over that threshold and take up responsibility. To journey on, but differently.

God leads us to the threshold of change

And so, let’s join Elisha and the disciples on their journeys. And we’ll see that God leads us to the threshold of change.

In our passage from 2 Kings 2, we encounter a fearful and clingy Elisha who really doesn’t want to lose his mentor and master, the famous prophet Elijah. Elisha does all he can to prevent Elijah from leaving him. Maybe Elisha didn’t feel ready to take on the role of God’s prophet to Israel. Maybe he was afraid to be left on his own, or maybe he just really loved Elijah and wasn’t ready to say goodbye. At some point in our lives, mentors and loved ones tell us it is time to say goodbye. Stepping out alone, into a new role, a new placement, a new calling, into life, can feel very daunting. But one step at a time, over a long period of time, God brings us through.

For Elisha, the moment of parting from Elijah came at the River Jordan. A crossing had to be made to the other side. And Elijah did it in characteristically dramatic fashion, rolling up his cloak, striking the water, and walking through the parted waters with Elisha.

For the disciples, Peter, James and John, they had to literally climb a mountain with Jesus. It was probably physically hard going for men who were used to being a sea level.

As we experience God's glory, we are called to mission

And so, here we are. At the point of the river crossing, at the mountain peak.

If you're a hiker or a climber, you know that when you get to the top of a mountain, it's a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, of seeing the magnificent views, surveying the landscape and seeing the wide horizon.

The three disciples must have had something of this feeling. But then, it was overtaken by a totally *unexpected* 'mountaintop' experience. Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. Glorious brightness. Mystical clouds. A clear, heavenly voice. The clarity of Jesus' deity.

For Elisha, the dreaded moment of Elijah's passing was equally unexpected and glorious. Elisha witnessed his master being dramatically swept up into heaven in a whirlwind with fiery chariots.

We've tried to re-create a little bit of that glory here. But of course the brightness of the candles and the atmosphere of the music can never compare to God's pure glory.

I'm sure many of us have also had 'mountaintop' experiences, where we experienced something truly extraordinary and we were struck by the glory of God.

These moments are wonderful:

- We get caught up in praise and lose any sense of time and space or self-consciousness.
- We see an amazing sunset and can't help point it out to those around us and think how great God is.
- We finally get the good news we had been waiting for and jump up and down in excitement and say 'thank you God'.

As a recent example, when I was writing this meditation, Christian came into the room and said, "I've got good news for you, firstly, come and look out of the window at the amazing view of the mountains, secondly, the Bundesrat has just passed the dual-citizenship act, *and* the lift is working again!" And each of these things made me want to praise God! I wonder what has made you praise God recently?

But here comes the turning point. As we experience God's glory, we are called to mission.

I want to bring your attention to a lovely detail in the Transfiguration story. The figures in the cloud with Jesus – Moses and Elijah – were the only Hebrew prophets who ever had the luxury of appointing their own successors: Moses chose Joshua, and Elijah chose Elisha. And Jesus's appointed successors? I wonder if Peter, James and John picked up on this subtle message, that they would soon lose their teacher and be tasked with taking up the responsibility of Jesus' mission?

We too are included in this appointment. Because Jesus tasked all of his followers with sharing the good news.

Such moments of awe and glory and praise and wonder are wonderful, they are to be treasured, and they may even be necessary. As we experience God's glory, we are also called. We are not meant to be passive observers. We are called and appointed to carry on Jesus' mission.

There is work to be done

But the reality is, we can never make these 'glory' moments last forever. We get tired, the phone rings with bad news, the fridge needs refilling. And there's a world waiting for the touch of Christ. There is work to be done.

The disciples didn't stay on the mountain forever, even though Peter did his best to make it so. Jesus brought them back down the mountain, and what met them at the bottom was a crowd of arguing people and a boy who needed healing. Not so glorious. There was work to be done.

Elisha left the place of Elijah's wonderous departure, picked up Elijah's cloak, struck the water as his mentor had done before him and crossed back over the River Jordan. His grudging feelings of farewell were now replaced with a clear sense of his own calling. And he was met by 50 prophets persistent on sending out a search party for Elijah's body, and a town of people who needed clean water. Not so glorious. There was work to be done.

An invitation to remember God's glory

When we're walking the paths of the valleys of life, in the shade and shadow, in the difficulties and challenges, in the endless chores or efforts that go unthanked, we really need a little bit of light. We need a glimpse of God's glory. We need to remember that the reality of God's awesomeness is still true, even when we can't easily perceive it. And we need to remember that God has appointed *us* to be bringers of good news to the world; to be disciples who make disciples.

And so, today, I invite you to grasp hold of a piece of God's glory. Something that you can take as a memory and an encouragement into these weeks of Lent.

In your bulletin there is a space for you to write.

Maybe there is something from your own life that you can attribute to God's work in your life. Something that happened, something that you witnessed, a prayer that was answered, a time when you got caught up in worship. Write that down.

Or if you struggle to think of something from your own life, take an example from the many testimonies we've heard from our sisters and brothers here in our worship services. Maybe there is something from their life that you can say, "Wow, God really worked in their life. I really got a glimpse of God's glory there".

If we need a reminder, here a few examples of the testimonies we've heard at Peace Church. We heard Randy's story of God's healing in his life. We heard Oliver's story of when God helped him to forgive someone who had really offended him. We heard Christian's story of the friend that God brought his way at a time when he really needed encouragement. We heard Joy's story of realising that even when we make mistakes God is there for us. We heard Siya's story of God answering his prayer for help when his students were arguing. And there are many more...

So take a minute, and write down something great about God that you know to be true. Something of God's glory...

--- (Writing activity) ---

Later in the service, you will also be invited to take a candle back to your seat and back home with you. And I pray that the light of this candle and whatever you have written in your bulletin will be an encouragement to you in the coming weeks when life gets difficult and you struggle to see God's glory.

As you cross over, remember God's glory and your calling

As I close, let me leave you with these words:

Remember the mountaintop moments when you witnessed God's glory. Remember that God has called you to take up the responsibility of bring his good news to the world.

And remember, you are not alone when life get's challenging in the valley.

And so, as you cross over, may the light of God's glory remain with you, whichever valleys you walk through in the coming weeks. Amen