

SERMON: 2017/08/06

[Invite children to the front. Play 'Mission Impossible' theme.]

KIDS' TALK:

That music you just heard was from an old TV series called 'Mission Impossible', which was made into a film in the "90s; and for those of you who haven't seen it, the story concerns a "spy" - played by Tom Cruise - who has to save the world from various nefarious criminals and terrorists, and to help him do that he has these amazing gadgets - a bit like James Bond.

Well, in one scene - my favourite one, actually - he has been captured in a restaurant and needs to escape; and from his pocket he pulls a piece of chewing gum with two different, coloured ends: red and blue - like this one [halves of Winterfresh and BigRed stuck together.]

Now, by themselves the red gum and the blue gum are quite harmless, but when they are brought into contact, they react with one-another and cause a huge explosion, which allows the hero to escape.

And I want us to think about how this [brandish the gum] can be seen as an analogy for today's exciting, dramatic story about Jesus.

Let's pray: Heavenly Father, by the Holy Spirit, help us to see this moment as the disciples would have: full of significance and rich with life-changing meaning. Amen.

[Ask children to leave]

[Pull out chalk-board. Begin drawing contour lines on it to represent mountains.] Galilee, as I know some of you here know *very* well, is a rugged, hilly place; but there is one little mountain that stands apart from the rest: Tabor.

And it sticks out from the landscape like a huge, monstrous pimple. [Draw]

Well, about two years ago, Rebekah, Poppy and I visited here [tap board] when we were in Israel.

We drove all the way to the top, up this road that wound its way around and around; and what we found there was a beautiful (Franciscan) shrine.

Actually, when we got there, it was almost closing time, and apart from a tour group of very quiet, reverential Catholic pilgrims from India, we had the place to ourselves.

And in the shrine itself there was, above the communion table, a mosaic featuring Jesus - but not hanging on a cross as you might (rightly) expect, with the Marys either side, but flanked, instead, by Elijah and Moses.

So, why?

Why engage in the tedious, *pain-staking* task of placing all those eeny-weeny tiny, little ceramic tiles side-by-side to construct *that* particular artwork.

Because it is believed that on this exact spot is where the disciples saw their young, charismatic rabbi conversing with these two men.

But perhaps you're thinking: "What's so significant about that?"

Those three are all Bible characters after all.

"Why memorialize *that* particular conversation?"

And the answer, of course, is that this particular conversation is unusual in that both of Jesus' conversation partners that day were *dead* - or at least one of them. But they certainly both were from the *very* ancient past; and so the fact of their presence on that mountaintop - *together* - was pretty startling(!) and, as such, worth recording by Luke in the gospel reading we just heard.

To see *these* men together was as incredible as you or I rounding a corner and bumping into, oh, I don't know, George Washington casually chatting with Julius Caesar and Oprah Winfrey. Both were *national* superstars; legendary heroes from long ago, *but* their famous lives were separated from each other by hundreds and hundreds of years.

By this time [pointing to the gospel], Moses had been dead for at least a thousand years. More than that, in fact. He, of course, had led the Jews from captivity in Egypt, through the Red Sea, to safety in Canaan. And it was he who wrote their holy laws on the two stone tablets that we heard about in the excerpt from *Exodus* just now. After Abraham, Moses was *the most important Jew in history*.

And there was Elijah. A prophet from Israel's earliest, formative days among the Canaanites, Elijah would have been a firm favourite in the games of Jewish boys. Not only did he have visions from God, but he could summon fireballs from heaven, and defended the Faith ferociously: Singlehandedly killing hundreds of pagans.

But, at the end of his adventures, he didn't die. The Bible tells us – in the second book of Kings, chp. 2 – he was whisked up into the sky in a horse-drawn chariot on a whirlwind. And was never seen again.

There was no funeral.

No tomb.

And in Jesus' day, the expectation was that, one day, Elijah would return.

The source of this hope was an old prophecy in Malachi 4. ... [Read verse 1 and 5-6.]

It seems, then, that before Jesus returns to bring heaven to earth, Elijah will precede Him in order to give the Jewish nation one last chance of redemption. (He'll be like those heralds in the Middle Ages who would walk into a room before a king arrives and blow a horn to get everyone's attention – pah-pa-pa-pa-paaaah!)

Elijah, then, to the disciples on Tabor, whilst being someone definitely from their past, was, in their minds, much more a figure of the future. [Pause.]

Let's be clear then, about what's going on: here, in *Luke 9*, we see a person who was emblematic of the ancient past – of tradition and law – colliding, suddenly, with someone who was emblematic of the end of history – of its destruction *and paradise*.

And who brings them together?!

Our Saviour.

And this *impossible* combination (of holy personalities) caused, we read, 'dazzling [light]'. (v.29) - like that produced by the exploding chewing-gum.

On top of all that, I think we can glean an important principle from this *transfiguring* episode.

Consider Peter's response to what he witnessed:

His offer to build three shelters.

He does this for a very understandable reason.

Here he was sharing this incredible, *exclusive* moment with Jesus, Elijah and Moses, and he didn't want it to end. It was wonderful. Stupendous. So he sought for a way to extend it.

But notice how as soon as he makes his offer the mountain is overshadowed by a cloud. It is as if God's shoulders sagged, and He was saying: "Seriously? C'mon man. This isn't about you."

And we can be a bit like Peter.

The Church is our shelter - and it is safe, predictable, warm; and when you really *get* Jesus and come to love coming to this place, you can forget that it doesn't

*belong* to you, and that you're supposed to *share* it:

It is through the Church that God has chosen to bless the world, so when, at the end of this passage, we hear Him say we are to listen to Jesus, we should do that by inviting others to come into this place of blessing.

Amen.