



**Week Commencing 20<sup>th</sup> February 2012 (The Rev'd Adam Lowe)**  
*Sermon Topic this Sunday: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"*

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**DAY 1: Read Mark 9:2-13**

After six days since one of the great climaxes in Mark (Peter's confession that Jesus is the "Christ" in 8:27-30) we are transported to one of the most well known, yet oft-perplexing (especially for the disciples present!) scenes from the Gospels – *the Transfiguration* (also see: Luke 9:28-36 and Matthew 17:1-13). Whilst it was Jesus' custom to go to a mountain and pray, we see here that he takes three disciples with him (i.e., Peter, James, and John). On this *high* mountain (possibly Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor) and before them all, Jesus is 'transformed' (the Gospels of Matthew and Luke provide more detail, Luke saying that "the appearance of his face changed", Matthew saying "his face shone like the sun") and his clothes become dazzling white (better than any laundry could achieve!). And lo and behold, who is Jesus talking with? Elijah and Moses (both important Old Testament prophets). Peter, who has just confessed Jesus as the Christ, is terrified so blurts out the first thing that comes into his head: shall he set up some shelters? He doesn't get what is happening. Here Jesus stands, beside two of the greatest prophets of old, the work of whom Jesus is continuing *and completing*. And there's something else to note too. Whilst Elijah and Moses never died in front of anyone (Moses went up to Mount Nebo, Elijah was 'taken up' in more dramatic fashion) and were indeed great prophets, here they stand more ordinarily besides a dazzling Jesus. The words from God (v.7) then make the point clear: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" Critical words in the Gospel of Mark that the reader first heard at the baptism (1:11), and now are reintroduced here.

As things return to 'normal', Jesus commands the disciples to be silent on the matter *until the Son of Man rises from the dead*. The disciples are confused by this, wondering what it means in the context of the prophecy of Elijah preparing the way of the Lord. Jesus makes it clearer (at least, it is clearer for the reader), indicating that this work of preparation has already been made complete (by John the Baptist). But now another prophecy, pertaining to the suffering and rejection of the Son of Man, must come to fruition. That trajectory of the cross – the final messianic task – has been set. So often, we can be like the disciples and be so confused by Jesus that we fail to really listen to him (with our heads and hearts). In our minds, we can limit God but fail to recognise the fullness of who Jesus is. This is why we must keep recalling that it was the Son of God who hung upon the cross, the one who is greater than any of the prophets of old, and who is worthy to be listened to by all. Part of a life dedicated to God, includes a dedication to actively hearing Jesus' words – even when those words are tough.

**DAY 2: Read Mark 9:14-29**

Since our lofty mountain experience with Jesus, we are now returned to the common struggles of daily life and suffering. We hear of the tragic situation in which a boy is so tormented by an evil spirit that his life is in grave danger. It's a situation that has been plaguing the boy for sometime (since childhood) and the father desperately seeks healing from Jesus. The disciples have failed to be of

assistance – not because of a lack of ‘power’, but due to a *lack of belief*. How amazing that as the man approaches Jesus for help, he even feels at liberty to ask Jesus with help to overcome his unbelief. What a great lesson for us sometimes, when we struggle to understand how God is working in our lives, to ask for help in this way! We should note the really strong contrast in this incident between God (good) and evil: whilst evil seeks to destroy, God seeks to create and redeem. We also note that whilst the teachers of the law were busy arguing about the situation, Jesus gets on with resolving the situation. Instead of trusting in God, the disciples had instead tried to just copy Jesus. The previous healings and miracles hadn’t happened because Jesus had a ‘magical’ method – it was all about the source of his power, God. Because Jesus is God, he can command the healing. Conversely, because the disciples are not God, the healing can only occur if they ask God (and trust in him). That’s what Jesus means when he says, “This kind can come out only by prayer”. True trust in God does not mean dictating to God our desired outcome. True trust means learning to think like God does, and accordingly praying in that way.

### **DAY 3: Read Mark 9:30-37**

Our passage today begins with the second prediction of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection (the third is yet to come). Each of these predictions is followed by instructions on discipleship and incidents that reveal the disciples’ lack of understanding. They haven’t *really* listened. Worse, even though they didn’t understand, they were afraid to ask Jesus for further information! (Compare that with the man asking Jesus for help with his unbelief!) What a great reminder to us: if we struggle in our understanding, our reaction should not be fear but a request for help!

Following the prediction, I love the coyness of the disciples as Jesus queries them about the content of their quarrelling. Heart of hearts, they knew that they shouldn’t be arguing about ‘who is the greatest’. Jesus, as we should be familiar with now, knows their hearts and in doing so presents a poignant response. True greatness is not measured by who is ‘first in line’, but by the depth of their humility and servanthood. What a radical message! We note once again that God’s kingdom does not play by the rules of this world, especially when it comes to greatness, honour, and power. It’s easy to pay lip service to the notion that the ‘first will be last’, but it’s a life of sacrificial love to really live it.

### **DAY 4: Read Mark 9:38-50**

Whilst today we begin by being reminded that the followers of Jesus are not connect by the crowd with whom they spend their time, but by the name in which they act (and whom they believe), I want us to focus on the extremely challenging warning concerning those who cause others to sin. Indeed, it seems that the chapter has been full of challenging words by Jesus (a critical observation when recalling the authoritative command to ‘listen’ that we heard earlier on). Whilst I do not believe that Jesus is literally commanding them to dispense body parts that cause sin (I wonder what would be left of anyone!), he is trying to paint a metaphorical picture that puts into perspective the true gravity of sin (the people would have been very familiar with such use of metaphor).

These sayings are challenging us to examine the quality of our discipleship. It’s evident that discipleship is not something to be given up lightly, or pushed aside at first opportunity. Discipleship is costly and intended to permeate (perhaps sometimes penetrate) every aspect of our lives. Further, as per the final verse (v.50), we should never feel that we do this alone. We of course always have companionship with God, but Jesus reminds us here that if we are to remain disciples (i.e., ‘salty’), we ought to seek the support of others too (“peace with each other”). We’re also strongly reminded that the quality of our discipleship does not just affect ourselves, but also has the potential to affect others.