St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
Sunday August 6th

Theme: (Luke 9, the Transfiguration)

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I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

Today we have a clear connection between our Old Testament and Holy Gospel readings. Moses had smashed the first set of Commandment Tablets in anger because of the general bad behaviour of the Israelites losing faith in God and building a Golden Calf to worship in God’s stead. God, ever forgiving, had given Moses the opportunity to have the tablets rewritten – the second chance option.

(Moses transformed)

The incredible impact on Moses was that in effect, when he returned down Mt Sinai from speaking with God, his face was shining so brightly it was hard to look at. Consequently, Moses covered his face with a veil, except when he was speaking with God. Quite an extraordinary account of the special relationship Moses had with God. His face shone, because he had looked on the face of God. Wonderfully, Moses **did not initially know** this. He was unaware of the greatness of his own spiritual radiance, because he was a genuinely and deeply humble man.

(Dalai Llama and Archbishop DesmondTutu)

Now, we have a similar situation between Jesus and God. In the company of Peter, John and James, Jesus also had gone up the holy mountain, and was praying. Suddenly his face also was changed, and also his clothes became dazzling white. However, Jesus’ transformed appearance is not merely because he is **experiencing** God’s glory (like Moses) but rather because he is the **very source** of divine glory.

(Jesus transfiguration)

Then the Old Testament figures Moses and Elijah appear, and he speaks with them. Both figures had important roles in Israeli history: they symbolize the Law and the prophets, respectively. Moses represented the Sinai Covenant/Law (as well as his influence in the Exodus) and Elijah represented the prophetic voice of the Old Testament

However, Moses and Elijah didn’t spend their time with Jesus reflecting on the ins and outs of the Law and Prophets. Instead, we are told only that they “discussed his departure.” That’s why they were there. Those recognized giants of the faith had come to point Jesus in the direction he needed to go and to encourage him, that down that path lies the salvation of the world. The human side of Jesus, like us, seems to need some affirmation that he is on the right path, that this is the destiny God has mapped out for him.

We too, probably have moments when we need some re-affirmation of a decision or a commitment we have made. When it relates to our own faith life, such re-affirmation can come from quiet and deep prayer. The moment of giving ourselves totally up to God and trusting in the guidance that genuinely comes from that exercise.

That’s the ideal situation anyway. I confess, I do on occasion just stop in my tracks and hurl up to heaven the plea – “are you sure you want me to do this?” By and large the response in my head is more likely “Trust me – I know what I’m doing”, than any dove, finger of flame, or blinding flash of light.

(Transfiguration video)

The way Luke frames it, the whole dazzling event up there on the mountain, ends up being kind of sweet in its own way, as though the Father — sensing the apprehension of the Son — sent down some reinforcements to buck him up and help him make it across the finish line. It’s the kind of thing a loving Father does for his beloved Son.

That Jesus perhaps needed this boost is testament to his true **humanity**. That Jesus did indeed go on to suffer and die is testament to his true **divinity**. That he would eventually be bodily raised again gets at both his humanity and divinity. Plus, it assures us that the salvation about which Moses and Elijah showed up to discuss with Jesus, is just the truest and grandest thing you could ever imagine!

However – (there’s always a ‘however’) – a few things to ponder as we move on through our worship.

(Disciples and transfiguration)

Firstly, how on earth did those three disciples just about fall asleep with all this going on? I mean appearances of Moses and Elijah are not your normal, expected moments, even when you hang around with someone as awesome as Jesus.

Secondly, how could these disciples walk away from this event and yet tell no one what they saw and experienced? From the looks of the text, it would not be a huge leap to think these three did not tell even the other nine disciples what had taken place. So, what’s up with that?

Thirdly, how can it be, following on one of the most dazzling visual spectacles that ever took place on this planet, that the bottom line from God the Father is “This is my Son, my Chosen. **Listen** to him.” Listen? Listen, and not “Look”? Why go through all this razzle-dazzle, bright-as-lightning stuff if the whole incident ends up being more about ears than eyes?

Maybe behind these questions something of the core truth of the gospel starts to come out. Maybe the sleepiness of the disciples is emblematic for how often they had missed the glory of Jesus when it shone right in front of them day in and day out throughout Jesus’ ministry.

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The truth is that Jesus did not need visibly to glow to display glory. His glory shone — for those with eyes to see — just as brightly when he talked to lonely prostitutes and outcast lepers, when he saved wayward tax collectors, and offered forgiveness to people who had never heard a forgiving syllable their whole lives up to that point. The glory **was** there. It’s still there today in our church if only we don’t just sleep through it and fail to mention it afterwards.  Maybe the distractions and general busy-ness of our lives gets in the way of our truly listening to what Jesus says about humility and sacrifice, and being servants of the lowest of the low in our societies still today.

When I’m stuck, or uncertain about the rightness, or appropriateness of a decision or action, the mantra I use in those moments, is WWJS, or WWJD. What would **Jesus** say to me here, or What would **Jesus** do here? However we do it, we need to listen really closely to what Jesus says to his disciples and to those whose lives he changed.

Yes - we do need to listen to him. Really carefully.
*Amen*