

Exodus 34 29-35; 2 Corinthians 2.12-4:2; Luke 9: 28b-36

Soon, after our service, we're going to be eating and hopefully tossing pancakes and you wonder what could that possibly have to do with Jesus who immediately after this Transfiguration story we've just had sets his face towards Jerusalem and his Passion. This is where we'll see the storm clouds starting to gather and all the forces of opposition combining to take Jesus down, to get rid of this awkward young prophet who's just causing too many waves, who's threatening the status quo. The powers that be don't like it, just like the powers that be never do.

So what have pancakes got to do with any of this serious stuff – the salvation of the world and your salvation and mine?

We're having our pancakes today, but normally we'd be doing it on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Shrove Tuesday was the day when people used to go to be shaven – to make their confession – before beginning their Lenten journey. A kind of spring-cleaning of the soul. It's that chance to lighten the load of anything that's been burdening you or eating away at you and hear that word of assurance that your sins have been forgiven. And if you've ever experienced that sacrament, most people come away feeling literally lighter, because you've been able to let something go.

A member of my family tells the story of how when she was a wee girl and preparing for her first confession in the week before the big day (when she'd go into the confessional for the first time) – in that week her mother sent her down the road to the shops to buy an apple pie at the baker's. Well on the way home she ate the apple pie – all of it. So when first confession came around she confessed to this heinous crime. And next time she went to confession she confessed again to eating an apple pie on the way home from the baker's, and the same thing the time after that, until one day the priest said to her: "Just how many apple pies have you eaten?" To which she replied "Just one." She was only six and not much happens when you're six.

That's kind of confession by rote, like you've got to come up with something to tick a box, as it were. But the spring-cleaning that Shrove Tuesday is really about, whether we ever go to confession or not, is something much deeper. The other name for Shrove Tuesday is of course Mardi Gras – Fat Tuesday literally – because this was the time when, to get ready for Lent, you used up all the rich things like milk and butter and cheese, to begin a period of fasting that would last until Easter. Hence using up the milk and the eggs for pancakes.

And the object of all of it is to be able to lighten ourselves so that we can make this journey with Jesus – we kind of get in training, we shed some stuff. Maybe we watch a bit less TV or spend less time on our phones (that would kill some people!) One friend of mine posted a farewell on Facebook to say he was fasting from social media until Easter. We do a bit less of the stuff that maybe fills up our time and fills our minds and maybe

makes us a wee bit sluggish. Richard Holloway once wrote that “there is no room for wonder in a life that is filled to the edges.”

So we put ourselves in a condition where we can climb the mountain with Jesus. Peter clearly wasn't quite ready for this because as ever he puts his foot in his mouth: Lord, it's good that we're here. Let us make three tents... Nowadays he'd be wanting to print T-shirts and build a visitor centre. So he sees, but he doesn't quite see. He certainly doesn't understand. He wants to do what the sluggish institutional church always wants to do which is to freeze the moment. Lord, this is so great, let's just hang on to this moment for ever – which is how religions become dangerous and toxic and oppressive. Let's just build something big, impressive and permanent here... It starts with tents, but that's where it ends up.

Peter, to be fair, is sleepy and struggling to stay awake, but that can be a picture of the Church too, and of ourselves. But Lent, again, is this time when we consciously, deliberately snap out of that kind of sleepiness and wake up to what God is saying to us.

Because this time when we kind of shake ourselves awake, it enables us to do what all three of our readings are talking about. It enables us to see. No veils over our eyes or over our minds. As Paul puts it, when you turn to the Lord, the veil is removed. And Paul clearly makes a link between renouncing things – any life-denying things we might be doing, habits that are maybe hurting us or other people – and this ability to see clearly.

We see God reflected in Jesus Christ, and as we open our lives up to him (leaving behind anything we need to leave behind) there is for us the possibility of change. We can change, from glory to glory. That's our hope. That's the reason we set off on this journey and almost get in training for doing it.

And of all the things we could see with this new clarity, it hardly gets better than what is happening on the Mount of the Transfiguration – or rather what it means. St Peter, speaking of this as an old man years later, says: “You would do well to be attentive to this, as to a lamp shining in a dark place.” This light, this glory, this radiance that's meant to light up your face and mine, reveals what transfigured humanity is meant to look like.

And it's this: in Jesus we're all chosen. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom, says Paul. In Jesus we're chosen, we're free. Whatever experience of hurt or rejection you might have had; whatever habits or things about yourself you've maybe struggled with, on the mountaintop we're shown how God sees every one of us, and we are shining, we are chosen and we're free.