

Reflection for the Second Sunday of Lent

What do Halifax and this weekend's gospel have in common? The answer is Mount Tabor. Mount Tabor is the "*high mountain*" of today's gospel, and it is the name chosen by the nineteenth century Methodists for their hillside village above Halifax. Mount Tabor is in a remote situation southwest of the Sea of Galilee and is 575 metres high, a little higher than Pendle Hill. It appears that Jesus has sought it out and gone on a detour in order to climb it.

Indeed, even before his ascent of Mount Tabor, Jesus had embarked on a period of 'time out' with his disciples, away from the crowds, and spent two or three weeks heading north towards the border with Syria and Lebanon. Somewhere in "*the district of Caesarea Philippi*"¹ he held a time of reflection with them, taking stock, and he has started to prepare them for his suffering and death in Jerusalem. It is approximately the halfway point of his public ministry and Jesus asked his disciples "*who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" What do they understand about Jesus? They replied that some think Jesus to be John the Baptist, or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. A lone voice, Simon Peter boldly declared Jesus to be "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" and, in return, Jesus told Simon Peter that he "*is the rock*" on which he will "*build his church*" and that he will entrust him "*with the keys to the kingdom of heaven.*" Jesus then goes on "*to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.* This wrong-footed Peter who took Jesus to one side "*to rebuke him*" only for Jesus to liken him to "*Satan*" and describe him as "*a hindrance*" and then declare that "*if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross*".

Following this time of reflection Jesus has led his disciples on a six-day journey south seeking out Mount Tabor where he takes "*Peter, James and John his brother*" on a climb to the summit to continue the learning. There the lesson is given by two towering figures from the Old Testament, Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the prophets bearing witness to Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's hopes and expectations "*together with the voice from the cloud*", the voice of the Father instructing them to "*listen*" to Jesus. This is the essential message of our gospel today – that we should "*listen*" to Jesus, listen to his words about his impending rejection, death and resurrection, listen to his call to take up our own crosses to follow him, listen to "*the beloved Son of the Father*".

Peter and the other disciples have been slow to understand that the Christ must suffer and that they must take up their crosses and follow him. On Mount Tabor, the mount of the Transfiguration, they are given a glimpse of Christ's glory-to-come to help them through these sufferings.

¹ Matt 16:13