

Reflection for the Sunday next Before Lent by Megan Cambridge (Lay Reader)

If you had the ability of seeing the future, what would you like to know? If you had the chance to see the whole future, would you take a look? If you could see the future would you attempt to change it?

I read somewhere that if we could see the future, then what we see wouldn't be like some high-definition film. It would be a blurred image of infinite possibilities happening all at the same time. All of those possibilities would be a probable future, and all would be true. Only when our timeline moved forward to that point, would one of those possibilities be manifested in the material world as the Present. The argument goes that the future won't change because there is no fixed future. What lies ahead of us is just a collection of infinite possibilities, it is us who decide what the future will be through our actions and decisions.

Just prior to our set gospel reading for this morning Jesus has been telling the disciples what must happen to him (Mark 8: 31-33). Jesus describes very clearly to them His future. Peter has been troubled by what he hears and rejected the picture Jesus painted of this future. Who would like to see into the future especially if the future was of suffering and death? Personally, I don't want to know what is ahead in this life but then for others the opportunity to make plans or arrangements and tie up loose ends is very important.

Think back a year and would we want to know the pandemic was coming – well maybe so we could take better actions — but would we want to know a year later we would still be struggling with lockdown? Jesus knows what His future holds, what He must do and follows that journey to its conclusion for us. If He had not done so could we still face our ultimate future with such hope?

Back to today's gospel reading and following on from Peter finding it impossible to accept Jesus' earthly future we get another glimpse of the future – the future glory of Jesus post crucifixion and post resurrection.

When Peter, James and John saw Jesus suddenly change before their very eyes and His clothes became shining white and when they saw Elijah and Moses, two major heroes of the past appear with Jesus, it was a "Wow" moment. Who can blame Peter for wanting to hang on to this moment? Finally, he is seeing something of Jesus' true splendour and majesty and with the added bonus of having Elijah and Moses here as well. "Wow!" Peter says, "It's really good to be here. Let me make three tents for each of you and we can continue this amazing experience". I always think this a rather odd thing to say but I understand Peter wanting to preserve the moment. We all experience things that we don't want to end; falling in love, time with family, moments of pleasure on holiday or the times with God when we feel close and connected and so wrapped in His presence. Peter had wanted a triumphant Messiah not a suffering one and this glorious moment on the mountain is how he imagined the Messiah to be.

It doesn't last and that 'wow' moment is brought back to reality and the disciples are brought down to earth again with a bump as they travel back down the mountain and Jesus tells them again of His impending death.

That is often how it goes there are the 'highs' the mountain-top, 'wow' moments, when everything is going so well and life is so good and then it can all change in a flash. These moments of life are set amongst the very ordinary and sometimes very challenging circumstances of life.

For most of us we can't see the future in this life and I for one wouldn't want to. It would have been very hard to voluntarily walk towards some of the difficulties I have encountered if I had known in advance and yet to have avoided them would have left me the poorer for it. I subscribe to the 'best not to know' school

of coping. What I have known is God's guiding hand and the love of Christ that has made all possible. Some things we will not have chosen for ourselves but they may have presented the greatest opportunities for growth. We don't ask for these things to come our way but when they do come, they reveal strengths in us that we thought we never had and with God's help and support we grow through the experience.

Paul in his letter to the Romans puts it this way, *"We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love."* (5:3-5).

We are not far from Lent when we especially focus on the victory of Jesus over sin and death through His suffering and death on the cross (the future He had described to the disciples) and then His victorious rising from the dead at Easter. Looking back, we can see Jesus come down from the mountain where He was transfigured in such a way that the disciples saw Him; as the Divine shining so brightly; coming down from the mountain of glory where He had met with the great prophets of old – Moses and Elijah; coming came down into the valley of suffering and pain and mockery and death knowing what the earthly future would be. We have a suffering Saviour who knows first-hand what we go through and walks alongside us, our inexhaustible strength when our own strength gives way.

The days following the transfiguration were going to be difficult ones for the disciples, days that would test their loyalty and faith. We do not generally know the details of what our future on earth holds. There may well be days ahead that will test us as we encounter difficult or worrying times and if so then we should let the words from the heavens echo in our minds, *"This is my dear Son, listen to him."* In Jesus God lifts the veil covering the future for a moment and we see ourselves as one of God's sheep and as inheritors of eternal life. We are given mountain-top moments where we can experience the grace of the glory of God at work in our lives.