

**3 March 2019**

**Exodus 34.29-35**

**Luke 9.28-36**

**Look and Listen!**



Look and listen!

That has to be one of the lessons learned from this story.

We have to say that these three disciples don't come out too well in the telling of this story ... and perhaps even more so in Luke's version of the story.

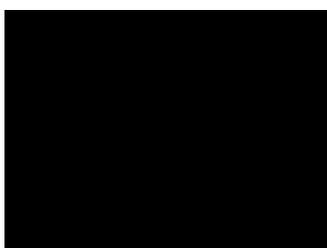
They are invited to be part of this incredible scene in which Jesus' whole appearance was transfigured and Jesus enters into conversation with these great figures from the past, Moses and Elijah.

Had the disciples been alert, they would have picked up echoes of the story from the Old Testament in which Moses himself had become radiant in the reflected glory of God's presence on the mountain. And now – Jesus is even more radiant as he spends time with God in prayer.

But what of Peter, James and John?

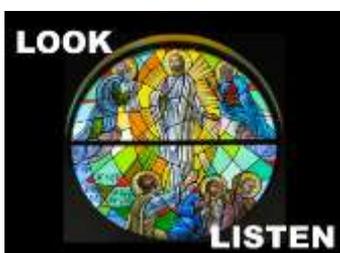
Of all things, they had fallen asleep and were missing the moment.

But we've all done it, haven't we?



A few weeks ago there was this wonderful clip of an MP in the Australian parliament who happened to be sitting just behind the person speaking, and who couldn't manage to keep his eyes open!

And when sleep overtakes us, it is really difficult to keep it at bay.



The weariness of the disciples kept them from looking and listening and making the most of this moment with Jesus.

This past week the British artist David Hockney was in the news, when he got stuck in a lift in Amsterdam! He was in



Amsterdam for the opening of an exhibition in which his own paintings are being exhibited alongside those of Van Gogh. One of the other people in the lift with him was James Naughty of the BBC. They were both off to find somewhere for an interview for the Today Programme on

Radio 4.

After the drama the interview went ahead, and James Naughty explored a number of themes with David Hockney, including the importance that David Hockney placed on the skill of drawing for an artist.



But David Hockney took this further and began to talk about the importance for the artist of learning to look, and to look intently at the world around.

He talked about the way in which artists will often see colours and space in a way that others don't because they have learned to look at the world and because they give time to this discipline of looking.



And it was weariness that prevented the disciples from looking on and taking in this moment on the mountain-top ... But it could have been any number of things, because we are not always that good at looking and

taking in the depth of all that is around us.

There is an advert that is being shown in cinemas at the moment for the 'National Art Pass'. (We have a very cultured sermon today. First David Hockney; now the National Art Pass.) It shows in 3 minutes or so someone taking on the challenge of trying to visit all of the galleries and museums in London to see all of the exhibits in one day.



All the art in London  
in one day

Hardly the way to appreciate art. The whole point, of course, was to highlight that even going at speed like this it is only possible to see a fraction of the public art that is in on display.

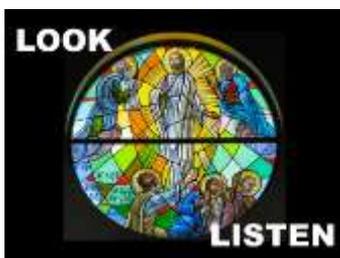
But he gets to the National Gallery at the end of the day, and just for a moment he slows down ...

And he quotes this:

“Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop to look around once in a while you might miss it.”

It is not only weariness that stops us from really looking, it can be busyness, impatience, the perpetual need to be doing something and on the go.

And so we miss the depth in things, as the disciples almost missed this moment.



And actually Peter suddenly switched from weary mode, to activist/ busy mode when he woke up and panicked. And his first thought was that he had to do something. ‘Let’s build some shelters.’

Which, no less than the sleep, would have stolen the moment. It would have taken him out of that moment of transfiguration and insight – beholding glory.



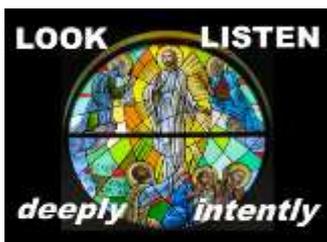
I have commented in sermons before how strange it is that at the end of this scene that is one of the most highly visual scenes in the gospel story, that we have God saying these words:

“This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to him.”

Not gaze on him, but listen to him.

But actually the discipline of really looking and really listening are very similar.

It is about paying deep focussed attention on the other person.

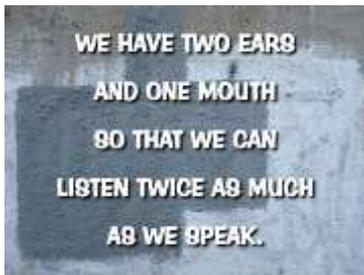


To understand Jesus, we need to look deeply and to listen intently.

The art of listening is one of the most important skills that we need to develop if we are to form healthy relationships ... and not least does this apply to listening to Jesus.

We need to understand that ‘listening’ is very different from ‘hearing’.

You might walk into a room and hear the radio playing in the background. But it's another thing then to give your attention to the radio and actually listen to the Beethoven Sonata or the Sam Smith single that is being played.



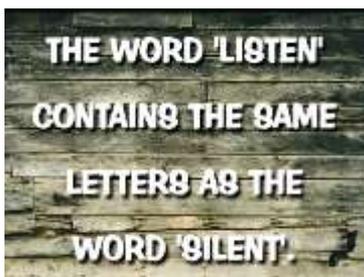
It was the Greek philosopher Epictetus who is first recorded as noting that “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”

I have no idea who it was who first made this next observation:



“God gave us mouths that close and ears that don't. That must tell us something.”

And in very similar vein the very curious fact has been noted that



“In English the word ‘Listen’ contains the same letters as the word ‘Silent’.”

We respect others when we listen to them ... truly listen to them. And that will always mean not rushing to speak. Learning the art of keeping silent to give space to others

to speak.

And another quote brings home how our desire to hear our own voice too often dictates our listening:



“Most people don't listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.”

Listening with the intent to understand ... to be challenged and changed. That must always be how it is with our listening to Jesus. Giving him space and time to speak deeply into our lives.

What is so important about listening, though, is that it is something that we do with so much more than our ears.

In looking on the internet at resources about listening I came across a whole number of posters that talk about ‘Whole Body Listening’. Now I am slightly



uncomfortable with these because they are clearly intended to control the behaviour of children in school – probably not a bad thing.

But what the posters do get across is that listening at its best is done with everything that we have at our disposal.

When we are genuinely engaged in listening our whole bodies will be engaged in that exercise – we will be giving our full attention to the person.

Using our eyes, so that we can read the body language. Looking deeply, is a significant part of listening.

Using our mouths – yes, to keep silent ... but also to ask the right questions, to indicate to the other person that you are really listening, to convey genuine interest.

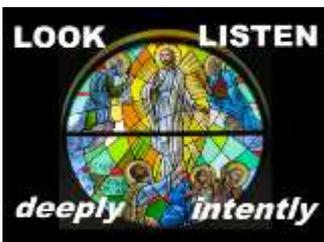
Engaging our brains ... to the point of allowing ourselves to be challenged and changed.

Using our hearts – showing empathy, compassion.

Using your body to show openness and interest and respect.

Listening to Jesus is so much more than listening to the words that he spoke.

He is the Word of God made flesh. We need to listen to him, by giving our whole attention to his words, his actions, his birth, his life, his death ... and to listen to him, the Risen One, still speaking to us today by his Spirit.



So that we walk through this world with the intent to Look deeply and Listen intently for every sign of Christ's presence transforming our world, transforming our lives.