

Wearing the mantle of faith

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Pentecost + 3C 2 Kgs 2 1-14, Ps 77, Gal 5 13-25, Lk 9 51-62

We wear the mantle of our faith—we are the ones who will hand it on.

I didn't like school much; I decided I'd prefer to be an apprentice mechanic. So I worked in a service station most school holidays to get experience. Early on, I had a great boss, but he retired and sold up. Then I had a not-so-great boss, so I gave up on the idea. I realised that an apprentice can be pretty vulnerable. But then, with a bad apprentice, the boss can certainly suffer too. Jesus had some pretty iffy apprentices – men and women the Bible calls disciples and apostles. And they had an even shorter apprenticeship with Jesus that I would have had as a mechanic. We just read about the high-handed way some of these disciples behaved at a pivotal moment in Jesus's ministry. But I'll get back to them in a moment; first, Jesus.

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Luke 9.51 is the turning point in Luke's Gospel – literally. These words mark the conclusion of Jesus's ministry in Galilee. He turns south and sets his face irrevocably on the path which will lead to his torture and death. But his disciples just don't get it – and they won't really; not until they can look back on all those events later on. At this particular time, they're pre-occupied with themselves. They have a sort of tunnel-vision focus on their own prestige; their own primacy in the pecking-order. You see this when you look back earlier in the chapter.

The day before today's episode, Peter, John and James had been with Jesus and witnessed his Transfiguration. ^(9.28-36) And today

he'd just performed a healing miracle. ^(9.38-43) So you'd think they'd be suitably awestruck. But no; what follows is one of those embarrassing moments where Jesus actually tells them what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem: *Let these words sink into your ears: he says, the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands* (9.44). And as usual, it falls on deaf ears. Luke tells us the disciples reacted by squabbling with each other about which one of them was the greatest. ^(9.46) Work that one out!?

So Jesus tried to get through to them a different way. He put a little child beside him and told his disciples that the least among them was the greatest. (9.47-48). *Still* they didn't get it. They changed the subject, condemning some outsider for using Jesus's name to perform exorcisms without their permission. Jesus tried to correct them yet again – *whoever is not against you is for you*, he said. ^(9.49-50) But as we just heard, their main focus remained their monopoly over the 'Jesus brand'; their insistence that they were in charge. They stayed *on message*; wilfully deaf to any other thought than their own. We just heard them offer to punish a Samaritan village for a perceived insult – *Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?* ^(9.54-55)

You'd think Jesus would feel like dumping this crew and looking for some humbler replacements. But he doesn't. In fact in the next chapter, we'll see him send lots of his apprentices out to proclaim God's Kingdom to every village they visit. Is this foolhardy? Overly trusting? Well we're the result, ultimately, so you be the judge.

One thing I do feel about Luke's gospel from this point on is that Jesus is often more grumpy. I understand this as his very reasonable reaction to the predicament he's in. For Jesus, *setting his face to go to Jerusalem* meant a journey to betrayal, rejection, torture and death – but as often as he

told his apprentices, they just didn't get it. That'd be enough to try anyone's patience. So Jesus travelled a frustrating road in company with these unpromising apprentices. He went anyway; he went there for them, and for you and me. And we are the legacy of his faithfulness – his insistence on following his call. When the Spirit calls *us*, that's our way too; no matter what. A true follower of Jesus will always respond to the Spirit's call.

That's no straightforward matter. I've tended to think of some people as naturals on the spiritual path. But a story I once heard about Desmond Tutu set me straight on that score. A former Archbishop of Melbourne, David Penman told a story about the time Desmond Tutu stayed with him and Jean.

He said that Tutu would spend between four to six hours of every day praying in the chapel at Bishops court. He was someone who truly opened himself to the Spirit. Each one of us who has been baptised has that same Holy Spirit living in us. But who of us keeps the door of our heart so wide open to the Spirit's transforming power – four to six hours a day!? How do we begin to travel that road?

In Galatians 5, we heard St Paul teach that the choice to travel that road involves a daily decision to turn from those things which divide us – abusive, aggressive, selfish behaviours – and instead, to turn to the things that connect us and truly nourish us – friendship, community and love. Paul gives us the guidance of nine principles which he calls the fruits of the Spirit; **love** and **joy**, **peace** and **patience**, **kindness**, **goodness**, **faithfulness** and **gentleness**, and **self-control**.

I like it that he calls them fruits, because it reminds me that these qualities are the result of the Spirit's careful attention to us. These are the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in a life of daily decision to turn to God; daily choice. If we are to grow as a community who can truly hand on the

mantle of our faith, we do it by listening for the Spirit's call from within us and by answering that call with our lives: and **love** and **joy**, **peace** and **patience**, **kindness**, **goodness**, **faithfulness** and **gentleness**, and **self-control** are the fruits of such choices.

We are called to make daily choices which agree to the Spirit shaping us as people who can truly hand on the mantle of our faith to people who need to know the love of Jesus; to people who need to know God's commitment to justice and mercy; to people who need to know the Holy Spirit's power to transform – everything really.

Today's message for St John's is this: ***We wear the mantle of our faith—we are the ones who will hand it on.*** Someone has done that for us. We will be next to hand it on. God trusts ordinary people to do this. Those frail early disciples show us that! Each one of us can tell the story of our own journey in faith; ***we wear the mantle of our faith—we are the ones who will hand it on.*** Amen