

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2018**  
**Sunday Next before Lent (B)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: 2 Kings 2.1-12**  
**NT: 2 Corinthians 4.3-6**  
**G: Mark 9.2-9**

### **Apple's and Baths**

A falling apple prompts physicist Isaac Newton to formulate his laws of gravity. Greek polymath Archimedes takes a bath and figures out how to calculate volume and density.

These are iconic “light bulb” moments in the history of science.

Or, as Archimedes reputedly said when insight struck, Eureka! Today, the flash of insight is measurable using brain scans, which show a part of the right hemisphere lights up at that moment. That moment when reality floods in and what was unclear becomes crystal clear.

The story of Newton and the falling apple is recorded in an 18th-century manuscript in the Royal Society in London. It was written by William Stukeley, his friend and first biographer, who quotes Newton as saying his thinking on the nature of gravity “was occasion'd by the fall of an apple, as he sat in contemplative mood.”

That other famous eureka moment—the Greek mathematician Archimedes and the story of how he solved a problem for the king of Syracuse by taking a bath.

King Hiero II had commissioned a new royal crown, for which he provided the gold. When the crown arrived, the king, suspicious the goldsmith had substituted silver for some of the gold and kept it for himself, asked Archimedes to determine if the crown was pure gold without harming it. How was he going to do this? He lowered himself into the bath and suddenly realized he could measure the crown's volume by the amount of water displaced and solve the problem. He got out of the tub shouting Eureka! and streaked across Syracuse, the tale goes. Eureka from the Greek and attributed to Archimedes (*heúrēka*), meaning "I found it.

This morning's Gospel reading describes that moment for the disciples, an "I've found it" moment, a moment when for Peter James and John the penny dropped, a moment when they saw the light and understood fully who Jesus was, the Messiah the fulfilment of the law, (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah)

I want to concentrate on "Eureka moment" this morning, but before that it is important to note that not only does this moment appear in three of the gospels but that Mark has also put this story of the Transfiguration in a section of his Gospel which both begins and ends with stories about blind men having their sight restored by Jesus, one at Bethsaida and one in Jericho; stories about two men who really did "see the light".

In Mark's Gospel, too, it follows on just a few verses after the story about Peter's own Eureka moment at Caesarea Philippi, when he says to Jesus "You are the Messiah".

There are patterns in Mark's Gospel, and this middle section tells us about how, once Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem, the followers of Jesus (or, at least, some of them) came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and came to understand what that meant for him and for them.

It's a story of the blind seeing, the light shining, the penny dropping, the Eureka moments.

Now, some Eureka moments matter more than others. Some are pretty trivial, and some matter a great deal. For the disciples of Jesus they were about as significant as you could get, and this morning's story of the Transfiguration is perhaps the most dramatic of all of them. I suggest that we try to avoid asking the "what really happened" question, and to try to concentrate instead on what the Gospel writers were trying to say to their readers when they passed on the story. That's especially important with a story as baffling as this one. The truth is that we can no longer understand some of the details that Mark includes in the story. Why did it happen "six days later" for instance, and why did Luke change that to "about eight

day”. We’ve no idea! What’s the special significance of Moses and Elijah? We do have some ideas, but we don’t really know.

In the end, I suspect, all we can do is seize on the key point of the story: “There came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’” Here are the disciples with Jesus; they’ve been together for a while now, travelling with Jesus as he taught, healed and miracled his way around Palestine. And, it has to be said, there were too many times when they just didn’t understand what was going on around them, driving Jesus to despair. Now, at the point in the story where everything changes and they’re travelling with him to Jerusalem, that misunderstanding won’t do any more. After the glimmerings of light shining, there has to be a Eureka moment, a dropping of the penny. And this is it. People have sometimes thought that the story of the Transfiguration is actually a Resurrection story that’s found its way into the wrong place in the Gospel. Probably not, but it’s an event that has the same sort of impact on the disciples. After this, nothing could be the same again. Eureka!

Which leads me to a question. What was the message of this story that Mark was trying to give to that group of early Christians in Rome when he included it in the Gospel, what message would those Christians have found in the story that would have been helpful to them? Perhaps something like this: when the first followers of Jesus went with him on the road that led to his suffering and death, on that road that threatened so much danger to them as well, the thing that kept them going, that persuaded them that this was the right road, what kept them going was that their Eureka moment had given them sufficient faith to stick with Jesus to the bitter end.

Once they really knew who he was and who had sent him, anything was possible. That was good news for the Christian in Rome too, because it showed them what they needed to follow Jesus along their own way of the Cross, to the bitter end. Their Eureka moments

would have been different to the one the disciples had, but Mark would have left them in no doubt that they'd been given all that they needed to continue to live faithfully.

What is the message, then that we can take from this story of the Transfiguration? Perhaps something like this: like the first disciples, like the persecuted community of early Christians in Rome, what we need to remain faithful with Jesus to the end, whether it's a bitter end or not, is to have seen the light about him, for the penny to have dropped, for us to have had our very own Eureka moment.

Once we really know who Jesus was and is, and who sent and sends him, anything is possible. Anything is possible. So, can you remember your Eureka moment, or maybe a few of them, or maybe lots of them? What were they? What did they mean to you?

Two weeks ago we marked the end of Epiphany, with its theme of light. On Wednesday we shall mark the beginning of Lent, with its theme of repentance and its story of the suffering of Jesus in Jerusalem. Our readings this morning have bridged the gap between Epiphany and Lent, encouraging us to receive the faith that we need for our Christian journeys.

"From the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'" "Eureka!" "I've got it!", cried Archimedes. Let's pray that we've all got the faith to stick with Jesus to the end of the road.

Fr Bill Addy