

CCV Luke 9:28-43a

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your side, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Isaac Kenevan, Archie Battersby, Julian Sweeney, known as Jools, and Maia Walsh were four British teenagers who died in 2022. Their families believe they died, because they were encouraged by people on the social media platform TikTok to try the Blackout challenge, which I believe is a sort of game in which you film yourself choking yourself and intentionally depriving yourself of oxygen. You then put this video on TikTok and everyone thinks how cool you are. I believe the exact course of events is being disputed, including in the courts, so I'm not claiming to know that this is exactly what happened, but, if the parents are right, it shows us how easily we do very silly things, because people we like tell us it would be cool.

We all do things because people we respect, people we like, people we want to like and respect us, tell us good things will happen if we do them. It's easy to point the finger at young people, but I think this is something we all do. It's also easy to point the finger at technology, but I think humans have been like this, since before the invention of writing, let alone computers. We are all always hungry for advice, for counsel, for gurus and mentors and there are many who are only too eager to take advantage of that. Within a few hours of opening our eyes each morning, we are all assailed by innumerable voices, real and virtual, telling us to do this or that and promising that if we do, people will like us, our lives will go smoothly and the world will be a better place. The world is full of people offering advice and the world is also full of people who are very eager to listen to advice. Some of that advice may be good, but for teenagers in 2022, it may well have been tragically, horribly bad.

Into a world flooded with advice and instruction and to a people eager to hear advice and instruction, we hear the voice of God in the Gospel reading, talking about the Lord Jesus. "This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him." God tells us to listen to Jesus. The reading is the transfiguration, when It's the story of Jesus' transfiguration,

when Jesus goes up to a mountain with his three closest disciples and his appearance radically changes, so that he is shining white. Two heroes of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah appear with him. We could spend hours thinking about the what actually happened and the physics and metaphysics of the event, but it's easy to work out the transfiguration means for us practically and what we should do in response. Those are easy questions, because God's own voice tells us in the reading. God speaks from heaven and tells the disciples to listen to Jesus.

What I want to do in the rest of the sermon is explore the reasons and motivations for doing that. People listen to people they think are important. People listen to people they respect and like. If the families are right about what happened, those teenagers listened to people on TikTok, because they thought those people were cool. You and I listen to whatever friends, family, life-style gurus and columnists we listen to, because we think they are intelligent, informed and wise. This passage tells us why we should listen to Jesus.

I think there are three reasons to listen to Jesus that emerge from the reading. Jesus is king. Jesus is prophet and Jesus is deliverer.

Firstly, Jesus is king.

The phrase "son of God" is rich in theology and symbolism. Some of us have been thinking about what it means on Tuesday nights at Soundings. One important aspect of it from the Old Testament is that "Son of God" speaks of kingship. So, for example, Psalm 2:6-7:

"I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.'

I will tell of the decree of the Lord:

He said to me, 'You are my son;

today I have begotten you."

Jesus' sonship here is his kingship. The word has other resonances too and we discussed some of them at Soundings, but I think here, the idea of kingship is an important part of what "Son of God" means.

So, Jesus is king. Jesus rules over us. Jesus has a right to tell us what to do.

In our culture, it's very easy to forget what it means to have a king. The country we're in doesn't have one, few of our different home nations have one, and whilst there are many monarchs round the world who deserve our respect, there are also many members of many royal families who attract public derision. When the Bible talks about kingship, it means self-sacrificial courageous service, which brings an authority to rule. In his children's novel, *The Horse and His Boy*, this is how C.S. Lewis defines kingship:

“For this is what it means to be a king: to be first in every desperate attack and last in every desperate retreat, and when there's hunger in the land (as must be now and then in bad years) to wear finer clothes and laugh louder over a scantier meal than any man in your land.”

That is how Jesus treats us. Jesus is a king who courageously suffers and sacrifices and so demands our obedience. We listen to Jesus because he is king. He is our glorious ruler, who reigns over the whole universe in grandeur and majesty. One day he will return and be honoured as king with a royal pomp and circumstance that is both more splendid and more deserved than any earthly ruler, because Jesus has earned it by being willing to give it all up for us, only to take it up again. The transfiguration says that Jesus is king. So we should listen to him.

Whoever else you listen to, whether it's your friends, your family, your favourite influencers or the columnists, bloggers and podcasters you like, how impressive would they really seem next to the king of the universe. Your friends say, “I will make you look popular if you listen to me.” Your family say, “I'll be angry unless you listen to me.” Your podcasters and columnists say, “You'll be clever and sophisticated if you listen to me.” But Jesus says very simply, “Listen to me because I am king of the universe.” We know that claim is true because he rose from the dead. Jesus calls us to listen, because he is king.

Secondly, Jesus calls us to listen, because he is a prophet. There's all kinds of clues to this in the story. He appears with the two “big hitters” of Old Testament prophecy,

Moses and Elijah. His shining appearance is like Moses' appearance after he's spoken with God, in the Old Testament reading. Jesus is the climax of the long chain of prophets, starting with Moses, reaching a turning point with Elijah, running on until John the Baptist and climaxing in Jesus' himself.

Prophecy, like kingship, is not an obvious concept to us, so what is a prophet? Prophets are authorised to speak on behalf of God. In effect, when a prophet speaks, God speaks. So, we listen to Jesus, because he speaks with the authority of God. That is a great reason to listen.

God understands perfectly how everything in the world works because he made it. We've all had the experience of buying an expensive, exciting new household gadget, ripping off the packaging and finding half-way through the first use that it doesn't work, because we've assembled it wrong, because we did not read the manufacturer's instructions. God is the maker of this whole world and Jesus is his greatest prophet. So, if we want this world to work, let's listen to Jesus.

The experts that fill our media say, "Listen to me, because what I say comes from years of research and study." Our friends or our family say, "Listen to me, because I'm clever and wise." Our favourite celebrities say, "Listen to me, because I'm beautiful and popular and successful." Jesus says, "Listen to me, because what I say comes from God and God understands everything perfectly, because he made it."

Jesus is prophet, so we must listen.

And finally, Jesus is deliverer. Verse 31 is important:

"They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

His departure is presumably his death, resurrection and eventual ascension. But the Greek word for departure is *exodos*, exodus. The Exodus was when God used Moses to deliver his people out of slavery in Egypt, to freedom, peace and prosperity in the promised land. With Moses standing next to Jesus, we're surely meant to make that

connection. Jesus' death and resurrection are another exodus. Jesus is saying that he rescues us from the slavery of sin, of meaninglessness and of hopelessness. One day, he will bring us into a promised land of eternal and perfect peace, beauty and joy. Once again, we know it's true, because he rose from the dead. That is a great reason to listen to him.

Popular self-help writers say, "Listen to me, because I can rescue you from your emotional and relationship problems." Our friends say, "Listen to me, because I can rescue you from being lonely and unpopular." Our colleagues and bosses at work say, "Listen to me, because I can rescue you from failure." Jesus says, "Listen to me, because I have already rescued you from meaninglessness and hopelessness and I will one day complete the rescue and deliver you from all suffering."

Jesus is king. Jesus is prophet. Jesus is deliverer. So, let's listen to him.

When it comes to how, there may be lots of ways of listening to Jesus. Of course, he's the almighty God, so he can speak to us however he chooses and we may hear him speak in very unexpected ways. But if everything can count as listening to Jesus, then nothing counts as listening to Jesus. There must be specific, particular ways of listening to Jesus.

Supremely we hear Jesus speak in the Bible. He told us the Old Testament was about him and he commissioned and authorised the writers of the New Testament. So, if you want to listen to Jesus, get reading the Bible or listening to the Bible – on your own, in small groups, in church on Sundays. The details don't really matter. But get in to your Bible until your Bible gets into you. That is listening to Jesus.

Jesus is king, prophet and deliverer, so let's listen to him.