

**“Don’t speak too soon” a sermon based on Matthew 17:1-9 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday evening 26 February 2017. This sermon uses an idea from a sermon by Fred Craddock published in *The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock Westminster John Knox Press Louisville 2011.***

It’s a well-known saying ... “Don’t speak too soon.”

And Jesus says something like it at the end of the reading today ...

“Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

There are times that we come to a moment too soon, and it is too much, so we cannot say anything.

It happens some times when reading the Bible ... we read a story and it is too overpowering, too confronting, too near to us, too close to the bone. ... all we can do is to sit with it.

The incidents of Jesus;

The passage today;

The letters of Paul.

I pray with a local Catholic priest each week, and sometimes after we have read a psalm, all we can do is sit quietly ... its too much.

Clement of Alexandria said ... “It’s in the nature of scripture that its written in brilliant obscurity so that it is not available to every casual passerby. It is concealed.”

It happens some times in worship – going quiet ... often with the children ... overcome ... don’t say anything.

It happens some times at death and grief ... don’t say anything.

It happens on Anzac Day ... don’t say anything.

But especially on moments of spirit, experience ... don’t say anything.

Thomas de Quincy said of William Wordsworth the poet. “That he had such a love affair with nature that sometimes he would go out and on a beach when he would see the evening sun sizzle into the sea or sometimes the thundering cataract, he would be so overwhelmed, he would distract himself by counting rocks or counting trees or estimating distances. He was protecting himself because it was too much.”

“There is a story that when Toscanini had finished sixty rehearsals of Bellini’s Norma, at the dress rehearsal, he put down the baton and said ... “The concert is cancelled.” Why? He said “The music is too great, its beyond human powers, I cannot do it. Do you know what he is talking about?”

In worship and I am sometimes utterly overcome by the sense of responsibility, of helping people experience God, encounter God, be known by God.

And sometimes after I have spoken, especially after the sermon, I am overcome with the significance of what I have said, for me, and I cannot sing the hymn ... I want to sit down and be quiet. And it happens in Communion.

These stories, these experiences, these moments can be too overwhelming for us.

Fred Craddock tells the story of his first year at University, people all headed into the ministry ... 18 years old.

A fellow named Bill Loft sat at the back of the lecture room and he asked Professor Lambert a question. A profound question apparently. Professor Lambert paused and Craddock thought he did not know the answer. And then his eyes welled up with tears and Craddock said to himself "there is something else here." And then the professor said – "Mr Loft, I think it would be better for all of us if I delayed my answer." Nothing more was said and people forgot the question. Then when they were seniors in the last year of university, in an advanced class of Greek, Professor Lambert stopped and said "Mr Loft, about your question."

And Craddock continues ...

"I have learned through all these years to piece together a little bit of faith to live by; I just make it out of snippets of things, the question of a child, a burst of laughter, a walk to the mailbox, struggling with the text, a little prayer in the morning, conversation with a friend, an evening meal, coming by the chapel when someone is practising the organ, listening to the choirsters practice down the hall. I just kind of pieced it together really. A whisper here, an aroma there, an intimation there, enough to live by."

And what do you do with all this?

Well said Jesus – "Don't worry about it. I'll lead you into Lent, to Holy Week, to Good Friday, to Easter morning."

Then you will find your tongue and be able to tell of what you have seen and heard.

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