

## Reflection for Sunday next before Lent

By Revd Sue Strutt

I bet there are not many people who have not played 'peek-a-boo' with a child, over their mother's shoulder, through the bars of a cot, behind a chair, or similar. It usually ends with the child giggling and the adult pleased to have made them happy (possibly stopped them crying). It's a case of 'now you see them, now you don't'. Or have you noticed how, when driving on a motorway, you can overtake a vehicle, manoeuvre through a junction, stop for a while in a service station, see the same vehicle, get back on the road and.....you find that vehicle overtaking you? 'Now you see them, now you don't'. I am sure you could think of other examples of this sort of thing happening, and mostly we find them at best amusing, at worst puzzling.

It must be a little like that when waking up from a coma or when one's brain is degenerating. In those cases it will be frightening, one minute seeing things clearly then seeming to be in a fog where you can't make sense of what you are looking at.

Jesus took his disciples, James, Peter, and John, into such an experience that was confusing and terrifying for them. But they trusted him and tried to make sense of what they were seeing. Elijah and Moses, a great prophet and a great leader, appeared beside Jesus who was transformed in dazzling glory. Then they vanished after the disciples heard the sound of God's voice, and Jesus returned to his normal, human self. Was it real or was it a vision, or even hallucination? 'Now you see them, now you don't'. Jesus was real enough and he indicated that what had happened was normal for him, and not unexpected. So, was it what we might these days call a mystical experience?

I have been exchanging views online with other Christians about mystical experiences. All agree that the recipient of such an experience feels a sense of love and union. The event may last half an hour or seconds. It may be transmitted by a dream, a vision, contemplative prayer, or in any still, focused moment. It may simply be a momentary feeling of total peace, but don't we feel like that when we are quiet and still? The point about Peter, James and John is that they knew God and loved Jesus, and he loved them enough to share a glimpse of his divine nature with them, and within the divine is eternity and resurrection, hence the presence of Moses and Elijah.

Moments of communion with the divine can happen to all of us but, perhaps because of our worldly lives, we don't recognise them for what they are or when they might happen. We also need to know God. We need to be ready to welcome Jesus into our lives with total trust. Even then, it will be a case of 'now you see him, now you don't' because we simply cannot be entirely focused all the time. But maybe we can be open to the possibility. As we have seen in the Gospel, the divine is present. We know Jesus as the Son of God, born a human being. In all his words and actions, he pointed to God the Father. We are all children of God, we each have the potential to be Jesus' disciple and follow his Word, and his Holy Spirit is free to guide us as we are free to choose that way even though we cannot always be aware of the divine presence.

On this Valentine's Day (no-one quite knows which Valentine it is) may you feel the love around you. If you have been on your own for these last months due to the lockdown, know that you are loved by God and, with Christian love, by me.

Sue