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How time flies! It is already the middle of February. The holiday season has ended, and everyone is back to normal life, back to work, back to school. Helen also started her grade 5. In the first week of school, her new teacher, Ms Charles, made small groups of children and gave each group a topic.

She asked each group to select a colour for best describing the topic and paint an A4 blank paper with that colour. The subject given to Helen’s group was ‘Future.’ Her group members thought and discussed, and selected ‘black’ for the colour. If you were asked to select a colour matching with ‘Future,’ what colour would you choose? Diverse colours would be mentioned with different reasons, but few people would choose the colour black.

However, the reason the children selected ‘black’ was very inspiring. They chose ‘black’ because no one knows about their future; no one is there yet. For them, the future is a mystery; it is like seeing in the darkness. I was impressed by their deep thinking. Yes, the future is a mystery; no one knows what will happen in the future.

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In today’s Gospel reading, Mark 9:2-9, interestingly there appear some people staying in the darkness because of their incomprehension of the future. Mark 9 contains a very famous story of Jesus’ transfiguration at a mountain. One day Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain.

Then and there, the three disciples watched Jesus’ appearance transformed and his clothes become dazzling white. In addition, they saw Elijah and Moses talking with their rabbi. What an incredible moment to them. They could not have believed their eyes. This narrative is significant, and most Christians would have listened to teachings based on this story at least more than once.

This morning I am going to focus on what happened after the event. When the three disciples came back down the mountain, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

According to the passage, however, the disciples could not understand what Jesus meant. Verse 10 says, “So they kept it to themselves, but they often asked

each other what he meant by ‘rising from the dead.’” What’s remarkable is that it was not their first time hearing about Jesus’ death and resurrection.

In chapter 8, before that event, Jesus gave his disciples the first prediction of his death. He said, “The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.” Thus, the way they behaved as if they listened to it for the first time is strange.

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But, it would not have been easy at all for the disciples to digest the concept of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and for them the Messiah meant the eternal king ruling the world. The death, and even suffering of the Messiah was non-sense. They had no idea what would happen to their master in the future; they were in pitch darkness. The bottom line is, however, that they did not stay doing nothing.

To get through the night of ignorance, they asked Jesus a question in verse 11: “Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?” Their question looks out of the context. Why did they suddenly ask about Elijah?

They seemed to try to grasp the unfamiliar concept of the suffering Messiah through the Jewish eschatology. By highlighting the role of Elijah in their traditional eschatology, they seemed to want to listen to Jesus’ more detailed explanation of the strange teaching, from their religious perspective.

Then, Jesus answered clearly that Elijah already came as the prophet Malachi promised; the second Elijah he mentioned was John the Baptist. Furthermore, he told them firmly that the Scriptures were saying that the Messiah must suffer greatly, and that as the prophecy about Elijah was fulfilled completely, the proclamations of the Passion of Christ would be also achieved.

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At this point, we can find a core message of the event of Jesus’ transfiguration. Look, the prophet Elijah was encouraging God’s people not to lose their faith in

the time of King Ahab, one of the spiritually darkest periods in the Jewish history. Due to his sincere faith, and at risk to his life, the Israelites were able to keep in mind who God was. Elijah was the person who brought good news to his people, declaring “Your God is coming.”

The second Elijah, John the Baptist, did the same job. The apostle Matthew said that John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord in the wilderness and made straight in the desert a highway for Jesus Christ. What’s remarkable is that by leading his disciples to the place of his transformation Jesus invited them to be the next Elijah- who should participate in the divine ministry.

At the high mountain they saw the amazing glory of Jesus; it was so spectacular that they wanted to stay there making three memorial shelters. However, they were not allowed as their role was to help other people see and experience the glory as well. So they had to come down the mountain, and Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they saw until he was raised from the dead. For after his resurrection their ultimate mission would start.

Yes, they were called to spread the good news of the death and resurrection of the Messiah. They were messengers like the first and second Elijah sent by God for the salvation and restoration of human beings. Not only the disciples 2000 years ago, but also every Christian has the same calling and mission.

It reminds us that we should not also stay in our sacred places confined in our own league; instead, we should come down the mountain; we should go to market places or squares to meet people as a disciple of Jesus.

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There was a man born in the Skye Island situated off the West Coast of Scotland. He grew up a committed Christian and devoted himself as a missionary. After migrating to Australia, the man was called as a missionary to Korea in 1910 when the Japanese occupation just started.

His mission was to serve lepers at the southern part of Korea; in those days lepers and even their families suffered severely from public contempt, financial crisis, and many physical and mental problems. The missionary dedicated his whole life to Korean lepers.

He opened hospitals and sanatoriums to heal their disease and improve their life-quality. Through his passion and compassion many lepers and their families got to know Jesus and believed in God. He was Dr James Mackenzie, a great friend of Korean lepers.

His first daughter, Helen, was born in Korea like her other siblings, and studied medical science at the University of Melbourne. After being trained as a doctor, she was commissioned as a missionary to Korea together with her sister Catherine, a nurse, in 1952 during the Korean War. Helen and Catherine established the Ii-shin Women’s hospital, helped lots of war refugees, and contributed to rehabilitation of war devastation during their lifetime.

The Japanese occupation for 36 years, and the Korean War were the hardest period for Koreans. There was no hope, no future. In those dark times, the Mackenzie family came to Korea and shared the good news of God’s love and grace. They did not stay at the holy mountain, but came down the mountain and visited people who needed the news. They were other Elijahs who prepared for God’s way.

They all passed away, but their commitments and compassion are still remembered by many Korean people. On top of that, the good news spread by their tears and sacrifice has raised many other Elijahs.

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Sisters and brothers,

From this Wednesday, another Lenten season will start. The Lenten journey was not only for Jesus, but also for his disciples and all those who have followed him. In this season of grace, let us come down from our comfort zone, the high mountain, and deliver to our villages what we have seen, so that the glory of Jesus may flourish among us here and now. Amen.