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“Vision On The Mount”

Exodus 34:29-35 Psalm 99 Luke 9:28-36 2 Corinthians 3:12:-4:2

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 9:28-36

When Jesus was being baptized, BEFORE he BEGAN his ministry, something happened that was phenomenal. As he has being baptized, the skies opened up and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and Jesus heard his Heavenly Father’s voice that said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Some of the people standing around said it was thundering, but the gospel writer records that it was Jesus’ heavenly father’s voice.

This morning we are going to fast forward three years to near the end of his ministry. Now, for the second time Jesus hears his Heavenly Father’s voice from heaven. This time the voice is accompanied not by the vision of a Dove, but by the vision of two men standing with Jesus, two men who more than any other personified the Law and the Prophets--Moses and Elijah.

So many of us are familiar with Jesus’ SERMON on the mount. This morning we skip ahead in the story of Jesus’ life and ministry to-the VISION on the mount.

This is Mount Hermon, also known as Mount Tabor the mountain upon which Jesus took his three closest friends. Hear the word of the Lord from Luke 9:28-36

The Transfiguration

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus^[a] took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake,^[b] they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,^[c] one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen;^[d] listen to him!’ ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

A little boy was out in his front yard, throwing a ball up in the air. An elderly passerby asked the boy what he was doing. He replied, "I am playing a game of catch with God. I throw the ball up in the air and he throws it back."

What goes up must come down. The process is so predictable that you could refer to it as a scientific law. The same process applies to our lives of faith. It is a good thing to "go up" to a great experience with God, but we will become greatly disillusioned if we do not remember that eventually we have to "come down" .1

This year the Oscar for the best documentary film went to "Free Solo" The documentary follows rock climber Alex Honnold's journey over two years to prepare to climb El Captain in Yosemite National Park. The 33-year-old accomplished the free solo feat, climbing with no ropes or harness, in June 2017. No doubt one of his mountain top experiences was winning an Oscar for a MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE.

Mountain Top Experiences, They are those times when we felt like we were on top of the world, really happy, or we felt that we were really close to God, really in tune with God's plan for us. That moment might have come at some exciting event in your life: graduation, baptism, your first kiss, your first day on your first job, your wedding, the birth of a child, a grandchild, or even catching your very first fish. It might have been something really spiritual, like a week at Luther Hill church camp or a church retreat. Or it might have been something of a smaller, quieter nature, like a very intimate conversation with your father or mother when you felt that they honestly understood what you were saying and why you felt the way you did.

Oh how we hate to come down off the mountain! We want to hang on to that moment for as long as we can. "Let's just stay right here and let the rest of the world go by for a while." But to freeze that one moment in time shuts off the possibility of the next moment.

Jesus spent time in the mountains. When he wanted to get Free Solo—get free from the crowds and get some solo time he would often go mountain climbing. One of those days he decided to take some back up. He took Peter, James, and John mountain climbing. After they arrived at the top they were sleepy. But they managed to stay awake, and because they did they saw something that must have made them think they were dreaming. They saw Jesus glowing and talking with two long dead heroes of their faith—Moses and Elijah!

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after he received the 10 commandments he did not know that his face shone because he had been talking with God. When he came down Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining and they were afraid to come near him." Shine Moses Shine! In the same way Jesus' appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white! Shine Jesus Shine!

When Elijah he faced down 500 prophets of Baal they called upon their gods for the better part of a day to burn up their sacrifice but to no avail. But when Elijah called upon his God fire came down from heaven and consumed Elijah's sacrifice. Like Elijah on Mount Carmel Jesus was facing a showdown with those opposing him and his ministry.

More than any two figures in the Hebrew Scriptures Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Indeed, when Jews refer to their sacred texts they call them "The Law and the Prophets."

As Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt to form a new nation, Jesus was to lead his followers into a new kingdom. Just as Elijah had confronted the evil prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Jesus was to conquer sin on Mount Calvary.

This Vision of Jesus on the mountain top was phenomenal. It was so fantastic that Peter said, "Let's build 3 booths, one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah. Let's build Mt. Hermon World! Bless Peter's heart. He always just says the first thing that comes to his mind. I can relate.

What did this Vision on the Mount mean for Jesus and for Peter James and John? What was the purpose of this remarkable demonstration? It verified that Jesus was who he had been saying he was. It established that Jesus was greater than the greatest men the nation of Israel had ever produced. If that wasn't enough there was the voice-- God's voice-- Jesus' heavenly Father's voice. "This is my beloved son! Listen to Him!" Don't listen to Peter! He wants to stay up on the mountain top. Listen to Jesus.

What did Jesus say that we should listen to? When he was asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul mind and strength. A second is like unto it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets." Our Mission Statement says it as well. "Love God, Love Neighbors, and Make Disciples (who will Love God and Love Neighbors)

Everything Moses wrote--the law, and everything Elijah and the prophets spoke and did, hang on loving God and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

When the voice from heaven ceased Peter, James and John rubbed their eyes and Moses and Elijah disappeared, leaving only Jesus. The old is ended. The new had come. The three friends kept quiet about this and told no one. No one wouldn't have believed them anyway.

The mountaintop was an experience that was a tremendous encouragement to Jesus. How it must have filled him with joy to talk with Moses and Elijah...to hear his Father's voice again. It encouraged him that he was on the right path. For his three friends to see it encouraged them also.

The purpose of encouragement is not to just be encouraged. The purpose of encouragement is to receive the courage to do what needs to be done. Jesus was encouraged so he could go down the mountain and into Jerusalem to the cross. The goal is to take this inspiration and translate it into perspiration for the work of the mission and ministry below.

Eventually everyone must come down from the mountaintop to live in a world which nevertheless continues to be full of sickness, pain and suffering. For there to be a tall mountain there must be a deep valley. So it is significant for us to consider what Jesus did when he came down from the mountaintop. What goes up.....must come down.

These three would need to remember this vision as they saw Jesus fulfilling his mission. The Vision on the Mount revealed who Jesus really was. The Mission on the Cross revealed what Jesus came to do--to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

When Peter James and John saw Jesus beaten, and scourged and dying on the cross completing his Mission, they would need to remember the Vision on the Mount to make sense of the High Noon Nightmare on the Hill of Calvary.

Like we saw my third Sunday with you ... Peter, James, and John were ordinary fishermen by background and trade. They were not great theologians, or generals, or high up in government nor in academic circles. Yet Jesus purposely took these three up on the mountain to see what he knew to be true--to see him for who he really was.

We might be tempted to think that, because we are so ordinary, that a life-transforming experience wouldn't possibly happen to us. We could block out the vision with our own arrogance, prejudice, or preconceived ideas, so that no new light could shine in upon our soul. But I say, never count yourself out. You have as much going for you as did Peter, James and John....AND you have their testimony of what they saw on their mountaintop.

There will be times when you feel like you are on the mountain top with Jesus and like Peter want to build Mount Hermon World! (☺) There will be times when you will be in the valley and Jesus will be there with you too. (If you read down beyond this morning's passage you will see what was waiting for Jesus in the valley below—a young boy who had been tormented with an illness since childhood that needed to be healed.)

When I went to visit Lydia Biegert I met a man who “raises butterflies.” He had a special plant on the porch outside his apartment and hanging off the branches were tiny cocoons in various stages of growth. It reminded me of a story of another man who enjoyed collecting cocoons and watching them hatch. One day

he and a friend were watching a large cocoon and the cocoon jerked and moved about for what seemed a long time, the man became impatient. He cut a small hole in the cocoon in order to ease and speed up the process of the moth's hatching. After just a few more minutes, a beautiful giant moth emerged from the hole in the cocoon. The moth was gorgeous, even majestic. But in the weeks to come they noticed that this moth never learned to fly. The moth had been denied the opportunity to develop its strength by breaking out of the cocoon. It never faced true struggle to escape the cocoon, so it could not face the struggle of learning how to fly.

The good times and mountaintops of life are better and more striking when we have traveled through some of life's valleys. In hard times, we gain the strength to have the really good times. Those difficult periods of life may be where we learn to grow the most. 2

I like the quotation by Henry Drummond, the Scottish theologian when he said, "God does not make the mountains in order to be inhabited. We only ascend to the heights to catch a broader vision of the earthly surroundings below. But we don't live there. We don't tarry there. The streams begin in the uplands, but these streams descend quickly to gladden the valleys below."³

The struggles and the service in the valleys give us the strength to make it to the mountain tops. And the view from the top gives us the inspiration to return to the valleys to serve.

What is your vision of who God is calling you to be in this part of God's world? What do you see this church's mission? What do you see this church becoming? What do you see yourself becoming? How does your vision of who you and who we are inform your mission, our mission?

The Vision on the Mount revealed to Peter James and John who Jesus really was. They obeyed Jesus and didn't tell anyone else about the vision until after Jesus' mission was accomplished. But now, they have told us all what they saw through these gospel accounts. What remains is our response to what those three saw the day Jesus said, "Follow me," and took them up to a mountain top. What remains is what we will do having been let in on their privileged information. What remains is how WE will respond to Jesus Sermon on the Mount AND his Vision on the Mount.

1. John Thomas Randolph, The Best Gift, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.
2. Carla Thompson Powell, God Moments
- 3, Edward F. Markquart, Mountains, Valleys, and Plains

Let's pray. Dear Lord, during your life among us your glory was cloaked, subdued. We couldn't have handled seeing who you really were all that time. Thank you for this episode in your life, for trusting 3 of your friends with a vision

of who you really are. Thank you that YOU resisted the temptation to stay on the mountain top with Moses and Elijah and that you came back down to our level and gave your life for us and fulfilled your Mission to take away our sins. Having given us a glimpse of your glory this morning, fill us with your Holy Spirit so we can glimpse a vision of who you are calling us to be and the mission you are calling us to fulfill.

Lord, there are times when the power of the moment astonishes us and we are able to catch a fleeting glimpse of your glory. Then there are other times when you seem so far away. We long for mountain top experiences which are altogether too infrequent. We easily grow impatient. We are quick to complain. We question. Teach us to resist the impulse to cling to things which do not finally matter. Help us to remember that you unfold your finest work within the full view of ordinary people who are engaged in ordinary life situations. Increase our faith. Increase our capacity for service, but never let us get so jaded that we can't be surprised. We pray that you would surprise us with revelations of who you really are. We pray that you would reveal to us who WE really are, joint heirs with Jesus provided we suffer with him that we may also be glorified with him. We are your children that you love so much you will not neglect to discipline us. We are your children that you love so much that you weep when we are weeping and you laugh when we are laughing. In Jesus name we pray.

BENEDICTION:

Go out into the world in peace, have courage, hold on to what is good, return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak and help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.