

Lesson: Matthew 17:1-9

1 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, before the suffering and death of your one and only Son, you revealed his glory on the holy mountain. Grant that we who bear his cross on earth may behold by faith the light of his heavenly glory and so be changed into his likeness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. A voice came from the cloud: "this is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him." Alleluia. (Mark 9:7b – NIV84)

Sermon Text:

Mountains often had a significant role in God's dealings with His people. It was Mount Ararat upon which the Ark came to rest after the flood (Genesis 8), Mount Moriah where Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac and upon which Solomon would later build the temple (Genesis 22:2 & 2 Chronicles 3), of course, Sinai (also known as Horeb) where Moses received the 10 Commandments (Exodus 19ff), oh, and Carmel where Elijah faced off against the prophets of Baal before running like a chicken to Horeb/Sinai (again) only to hear that gentle whisper from God (1 Kings 18 & 19).

Jesus was no stranger to mountaintops either. In fact, we just heard Him preaching His sermon on the mount. That's the mount of Olives with the Garden of Gethsemane at its base which is a regular teaching spot for Jesus and the disciples. Zion, Moriah, Olives and Calvary were all mountains around Jerusalem.

In the English language, we have the expression "mountain-top experience". This expression has originated from the Bible because of the dealings God had with His people on various "mountain-tops". Of course, Christianity is not alone here, whether the Dalai Lama of Buddhism or Islam's Muhammad or the plethora of other pagan prophets both foreign and domestic, mountains figure prominently in revelations and visions whether because of the perceived closeness to a heaven high above or because all things ultimately copy the one true reality of God's Holy revelation throughout time. So the phrase has come to mean a moment of transcendence or understanding and in particular an experience of significant enlightenment given by God. Today then, we come to the Mount of Transfiguration and there we find A

MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE: BEHOLD THE GLORY WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED ... HIDDEN THAT IT MIGHT BE GIVEN TO US.

What do we see on the Mountain of the Transfiguration? I think it's what we have always wanted. Here Jesus reveals himself in a way that cannot be denied. The brilliant glory of God shines forth from the Son. Consider the whole scene once more. *His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

Every time I read it, I'm with Peter. YES, Lord! YES! Give me some more of this. Forget the cross with its pain and torment. Forget the Means of Grace, Your gospel in Word and Sacraments. Let's put on a show Lord! Show them Your glory like this! Then they'll stream in by the bus loads, then we'll put all those false pagan pretenders to shame, then we'll finally be successful.

It's been the theme since the dawn of time. Adam and Eve wanted to hold the glory of God in their hands, in their heads, to be like Him so they ate the fruit forbidden (Genesis 3). Moses wanted to prove a point to the irritating Israelites so he changed up the message and put on a little show and was barred from the promised land (Numbers 20). Elijah ran, because the show didn't work, at least in his estimation and Ahab and Jezebel were still after him (1 Kings 18-19). The rich man told Abraham, in Jesus' parable, to put on a show, raise the dead, and then his relatives would believe (Luke 16). Abraham's response is interesting *"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:31).'"* That last phrase of God on the mountain is interesting then is it not, the Father speaks from within that bright and brilliant cloud of glory, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* The disciples' reaction to that is equally interesting, *"When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified."*

Terrified? Yes, this is how it always ends up it would seem. When Adam and Eve reached out for the glory not their own terror ensued. Hiding in the garden they didn't look for God, He looked for them. Moses, miffed at God's seeming inability to help or perhaps that he didn't strike with vengeance to protect his servants honor, as he shepherded this stiff-necked people, was humbled. Elijah was reminded that God works as He chooses and not as Elijah demands and the glory that we so often seek and that we wish God would display in this world against the sinners who seem to thumb their nose at the church, we'll we are too often numbered among them. Our sin separates us from the holiness we crave. Even Moses when he asked to see God was reminded, *"No one can see my face and live (Exodus 33:20)."* Truth be told as I stand in the glory of God, in the perfect of holiness, the results are always the same. I see my own shortcomings. I behold my own sin. All which I was able to overlook in my life is laid bare before the light of the glory of God and like Peter, James, and John, I'm left terrified, face in the dirt.

But then what happens? *Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."* It's just Jesus again, glory hidden, who reaches out to these terror-stricken souls, touches them and speaks, *"Don't be afraid!"* Why not!?! For God hides

this glory in flesh for us. God hides this glory in His Word. He displays it not in the glory of the Law which terrifies us with its perfection but in the glory of the cross which fulfills God's promises for us.

Yes, dear friends, this is all here for us as well. Moses and Elijah, with mountaintops of their own, stand with Jesus. Why are they here? *"To speak of His impending departure"*, Luke tells us (Luke 9:31), *"which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem."* The Father, no where to be found simply heard speaks words which edify with every syllable. This is God's Son, God in flesh for us. Because He is the perfect fulfillment of the Law, the Father is well pleased in Him. He is and will be the perfect sacrifice for sin as He travels to the other mountain where cross looms large and death and resurrection await that He might dispel our fear of God's glory forever. That we may behold the face of God in perfect joy and everlasting happiness in heaven.

All of that dear friends remains ours because Jesus hide the glory of the mount of transfiguration for sinful mankind and because he continues to do so in unassuming Words from a book which God bids us to listen to while here in this world. In simple sacraments, in which God miraculously reaches out and touches us, giving us all that we need, even in spite of the fact that we so often chase after glory. This is how Peter himself will later use this account in the words of our second lesson today. *And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:19-21).

As we began, we spoke the mountaintops of the great men of Scripture. But then as we close, perhaps, it's time to reconsider those mountaintops. Surely given for the benefit of men like Peter, James and John, Moses, Elijah and the rest, but also for us. These are our **MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCES**, were God would reveal Himself to us in Glory we have so often wanted that we might realize the love on display as it is hidden it to give us the forgiveness we so desperately need. Throughout the season of Lent and every season of the year, to God all praise and glory! Amen!