

“MOUNTAINS CHANGE US!!”

TRANSFIGURATION B

February 15, 2015

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

Today's Funny:

Before they were to attend the cousin's high school graduation the pastor, knowing how fidgety both of his children could get, thought he'd prepare them for the event.

"Graduations are sometimes long and boring," he said. "I want you two to behave and not constantly ask when it is going to be over."

Don't worry, Dad. We'll live," the daughter replied. "We last through your sermons, don't we?"

TEACHING NOTES FROM THE MESSAGE:

- I. Mountaintop experiences are fine, but we can't live on the mountaintop.
- II. The mountaintop helps us to see Jesus and ourselves in a new way.
- III. The Bible says that it was the "sixth day". Maybe that would cause us to think about the "Sabbath".
- IV. Worship is a mountaintop.
- V. First Communion is a mountaintop.
- VI. Mountaintops change us so we can live in the valley, the valleys of our lives.

MESSAGE:

Jim (Price) told about his mountaineering experience. He climbed the Grand Teton. He said, "I felt so close to God that I felt like I could just reach out and touch God. If there had been a chapel there, I'd have moved there in an instant." As an aside, the guide told him that you have to give up climbing before you reach 35 otherwise it takes more and more to 'get the thrill' and the risks you take are more and more dangerous. Finally, it become all about you. When it becomes all about you and not about the mountain the mountain will kill you."

We love our "mountain top experiences". We've all had them. Those peak experiences in our lives that were "the best day of my life!!" Maybe it was our wedding day or the birth of one of our children. Or perhaps it was standing on mountaintop or in some awesome place in this great creation of God. We've had those times and those places where we felt like we could just reach out and touch God. We've echoed Jim's words, and Peter's, if there were just a chapel here, I'd move in right away.

Let's stop to think about this, though, for a moment. When you get right down to it, a mountaintop is not a very pretty place to be, really. It is barren. It is hard to get enough air. It is often stormy; in fact sometimes so stormy that one can't even stand up. There is hardly any life there. If it weren't for the sense of accomplishment, the thrill of the moment, or the view, it would be much. We really wouldn't want to live on a mountaintop. As they say, a mountaintop is a great place to be from, but I really wouldn't want to live there.

If one really wants a nice place to live, to really live, one has to go to the valley. In the valley there is balance, the rain and the storms, the sun and darkness. There is the balance of oxygen and soil that enables life. It is in the valley that real life comes, that one can grow, that one can really dwell. Grass Valley has a bit of both, mountaintop and valley!!

Of course, we want to visit mountains from time to time. In fact it is nearly necessary for us to "go to the mountain" once in a while to find clarity, to find perspective, to renew our sense of awe or even to refocus and revive. But living there—that's something different!!

It's no great mystery, really. There is a real difference between the two — mountains and valleys. After all, life is lived in the valley, not on the mountaintop. Things are different.

Here's how it plays out in the Bible:

On the mountain, we encounter almighty God;

in the valley, there is an encounter with the demonic.

On the mountain we encounter our faith's heritage;

in the valley, we encounter those who consider questions of faith as occasions for battle.

On the mountain, God's calming voice is heard;

in the valley, human argument is heard.

On the mountain, disciples are in a mood for worship;

in the valley, the disciples are spoiling for a fight.

On the mountain, the glory of God is revealed;

in the valley, the power of sin and unbelief is revealed.

"O Lord, carry me away to the mountain," might be our prayer. YES, Lord!

But then we remember the place of our ministry is with those who need our help down in the valley.

(David Leininger, WOW!)

You see, the point is life is in the valley. Real life is in the valley. The real opportunities to be in the glory of God and live out God's call are in the valley.

So what about this "transfiguration" story? As far as I can tell, it is pointless to ask how this all took place. I don't think it has to do with Jesus "aglow" in the dark. I don't think it has much to do with Moses and Elijah appearing there. I don't even think it has to do with the disciples wanting to stay on the mountaintop.

I think it has everything to do with the disciples having an opportunity to see Jesus in a new way. It has everything to do with the disciples then seeing themselves in a new way.

Isn't that the purpose of mountaintop experiences, to help us see things in a new way? Maybe to see ourselves in a way that we've never seen ourselves before. Maybe to see the world in a way we've never seen the world before.

Mountaintops do change us. Seeing God, worshipping, encountering the living God, hearing God's voice. Those are all experiences that mold us and shape us for living. Mountaintops shape us for living. Mountaintops shape us for ministry.

Did you catch a little subtle detail in the reading? "On the sixth day" Jesus took them up the mountain. I think that would cause us to think about the Sabbath. Connect that with the common understanding of scripture that one "goes up" to the place of the Lord, we have a suggestion that on the mountaintop we worship, we encounter the living God. In our encounter with the living God we see things clearly. We see ourselves clearly, we see God clearly, and we see the place where we live clearly. The mountain changes us.

Here we are today, on the mountaintop, this mountaintop. It isn't about glowing in the dark, but it might be about being aglow with the presence of Jesus. It isn't about seeing Moses or Elijah, but we might hear the voice of God.

Each week, today, we gather at the rail. We gather around our Lord's table as God's big family. We see Jesus hosting this meal. We see Jesus getting close to us in love. We see the altar rail as something bigger than just this table with people past and present from around the world gathered at the table that we cannot see, but only imagine. Holy Communion as God's continual gift to us so that we remember who we are (God's family) and we remember what God wants us to be (God's family).

Each week, on the mountaintop we have these memorable moments with God. Each week, on the mountaintop we meet God in a way that transforms us, reshapes us and renews us. These mountaintops are great. We love them, and wouldn't miss them for the world.

But we can't live here. We can't live our whole life on this mountain. So, we go to live where we grow, serve and where we become who we're called to be—Christ's body bringing words of hope and grace to the world.

The top of the world is not a mountain. It is a place inside you. From where you can decide to sit and watch. Or put on your shoes and dance. Live and dance with the wonders of God's grace and fullness of God's glory.

Amen.