

MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCES

Luke 9:28-36

No doubt you've heard the expression used before, but what do we really mean by it. Well, to me, it means having a wonderful, out of the ordinary, breath-taking, awe-inspiring, eye-opening spiritual experience of God's closeness.

Pat and I love to go to Western NC to a very special place just west of Asheville. It's called Lake Junaluska. It's in the Great Smokey Mountains. Every time we go we have a literal "mountain top experience" as we spend our vacation in the mountains and feel a special closeness to God. But I've also had mountain top experiences in other places too, like at the beach when I'm surf fishing, or watching the sun come up over the horizon at the beach, or at a weekend spiritual retreat, like the Walk to Emmaus weekend, or any place where I've had a special spiritual experience of God's amazing love and power. You see, you don't have to go to the mountains to have a mountain top experience. They can happen anywhere, anytime IF you're heart, mind, and spirit are open to it.

Today, I want to tell you about a mountain top experience from Luke's gospel. I find it interesting that whenever Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds for some down time with God, he very often went up a hill or mountain to pray. I don't know what it is about being up high, but it must have meant something

to Jesus. After all, a lot of things in the bible happened on mountaintops (Abraham, Moses, Elijah).

Anyway, one day, I can imagine Jesus sitting around a campfire, with his closest friends, Peter, James, and John. I can also imagine him saying something like, "I want you to come with me. I have something to show you. So, they leave with Jesus to begin a climb up what scholars believe to be Mt. Hermon. Now, this was no small hill. If it was Mt. Hermon, its peak was some 9k above sea level. Imagine climbing that high. Whether they went to the summit or not, I'm not sure. Regardless, I'm sure they were exhausted by the time they stopped. I've done a little hiking in my day as a Scout leader, in the mountains, and I can tell you it will wear you out!

Anyway, they arrive at their destination. The disciples decide to take a little nap while Jesus prays. During his prayer, something unusual happens to him. His face suddenly starts changing in appearance! His clothing becomes a brilliant, gleaming white! You might even say that Jesus was glowing! (Sounds like something from a science fiction movie!) What was happening? Well, Jesus was being transformed or changed! Jesus was being clearly identified now, by the power of God as God's Chosen One, the Messiah!

Then just as suddenly, two men appeared with Jesus—Moses and Elijah. The appearance of Moses was God's way of connecting Jesus with the Law of God, and the appearance of Elijah was the fulfillment of the OT prophets.

Here they were, the 'super hero's' of God's people, having a conversation with Jesus.

But what were they talking about? What were they saying to him? Luke tells us that they were discussing Jesus' departure. They were discussing what was to happen to Jesus as he made his way to Jerusalem, not too many days after this event.

Jesus knew he was going to die at the hands of the scribes and priests. But maybe Moses and Elijah were sent to give him more information or maybe to encourage him, or to reaffirm that this was all part of God's perfect plan for him.

Just then, the disciples wake up from their little power nap. Rubbing their eyes they see enough of what's going on to know that something weird is happening to Jesus! They somehow recognize that he's speaking to Moses and Elijah. They know that THIS was what Jesus wanted them to see, and they're moved to action!

Peter, always the impulsive one, says the first thing that comes to him: "*Let's build 3 structures to mark the occasion!*" You know, that was pretty common thing to do, build a monument or structure to mark a special encounter with God. Today we build memorials, statues, and land marks to mark special

events or to honor special people. The problem with memorials however is that they're just there. We go back to them, remember, maybe reflect a little, but then go on about our business.

God had other plans for these disciples though. God wasn't into urban renewal projects or landscaping. This wasn't what God had in mind at all. No sooner had Peter uttered these words did God speak, with a clear voice to them. With a cloud enveloping them, God speaks these words: "This is my Son, the Chosen. Listen to him!" Then the cloud lifts and there they all stood, speechless, with Jesus. What could they say? They had witnessed the supernatural power of God! They'd seen Jesus transfigured right before their eyes, and they'd seen the glory of Jesus and heard the voice of Almighty God!

Yeah, I'm pretty sure this is the ultimate mountain-top experience. But what did this mean to Jesus' disciples? How did it affect them? More importantly, what can it mean for us for Jesus' disciples today?

Well, as far as Jesus' disciples were concerned, they still didn't get it after witnessing this phenomenon. Even after seeing Jesus' transfigured; even after seeing Moses and Elijah with their own eyes; even after hearing the voice of Almighty God, they still didn't get it. How do we know this? Well, the bible tells us that they were still confused at Jesus' talk about dying and going to Jerusalem to be killed by the scribes and priests. They couldn't see God's plan. But that was OK! Why? Because after Jesus' resurrection, it all came

back to them. They remembered everything Jesus said and everything he taught them! And this would sustain them and carry them through any and all of life's dark valleys.

And what about us? Well, if you've professed your faith in Christ, given your heart to the Lord, living by faith and not by sight, then you believe that Jesus IS the Son of God; that he IS the Chosen One, the Messiah. And you believe that Jesus died for your sins to give you the hope of abundant life in this life, and the hope of eternal life in the life to come!

On this Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday before Lent begins, Jesus has been revealed to us again. God has spoken to us, again, through his Holy Word! And God has said to us, "*This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him!*"

Did you hear that? He said, "*Listen to him!*" We don't need to go out and start a building project like Peter. But, we should be moved to action. When those disciples came down off that mountain, they returned to the people, to ministry, and spreading the Good News of the Gospel with Jesus. We're to be busy doing the work of Christ until he comes back.

Yes, we need to be busy building the kingdom of God, sharing the Good News at every opportunity and trying to make a difference in people's lives

here in Lewes. (being a verb!) But the thing I think God wants us to hear most today is this: “LISTEN TO HIM!” To me, that means that in order to listen, we've got to to slow down, take the time to listen to what Jesus has to say to us; to listen to his word, listen to his counsel, and to listen to the Holy Spirit speak to us before we move out to action.

Next Wednesday night marks the beginning of Lent with our Ash Wednesday service. The 40 days of Lent is a wonderful opportunity for all of us, including your pastor, to do some listening. It's an opportunity to take some time to read our bibles and to hear what Jesus has to say to us. It's also a great time to examine our lives, our hearts, to reflect on God's call on our lives, and to prepare ourselves for the greatest event in the history of humankind—the Resurrection Sunday!

Pastor Fred Duncan