

“MOSES: IV – MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCES”

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Elkton United Methodist Church
March 3, 2019

Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 34:29-35

Luke 9:28-36

Have you ever walked up to a person you’ve known forever and thought, “hmm . . . there’s something different about them!”? You can’t put your finger right on it, until you discover they’ve gotten new glasses, or a new hair style or color, or shaved off a mustache or beard.

Well, multiple that experience by about a million and you’ll get what happened to all of the central characters in this morning’s scripture lessons. Something was different with every single one of them – but people didn’t have to struggle to figure it out – it was crystal clear.

Let’s start with the guy with whom we’ve been spending four weeks – Moses. God called Moses to the mountaintop and there gave him the Ten Commandments to take back to the people. It was such a profound experience in Moses’ life that the scripture says that “the skin on his face was shining.” He literally glowed from his

encounter with God – he was a changed man. And everyone who saw him could see that.

Turn to the Gospel lesson and it's the disciples who come down from a mountain changed. In fact, their experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration was so profound, so life-changing, that they didn't want to come down. Remember what happened? Jesus was transfigured before them, his clothing became dazzling white, and Moses and Elijah were talking to him. Moses and Elijah – men long gone, men from centuries gone by – standing there talking with Jesus.

When they saw that, those disciples knew exactly who Jesus was – the Son of God, who had come to fulfill what the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah) had done. It was like a passing of the baton, and when they saw that the disciples knew exactly who Jesus was – the perfect Son of God come to save the world, and their hearts filled with joy and gladness. Who wouldn't want that moment to not end? Who wouldn't want to, like Peter, make a monument and stay there, stay in that place where life had changed forever and was absolutely perfect?

That's what mountaintop experiences, mountaintop moments are like, right? We don't want them to end. I don't know what experiences you've had like that, but maybe it was when you, too, found yourself literally at the top of a mountain and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was real, and God made that beautiful mountain and everything else in the world, and God loved everything he created, including you – and you didn't want that moment to end.

I remember having an experience like that as I stood at the rim of the Grand Canyon. It was so overwhelming and so powerful, and I clearly remember being irritated at people nearby who were laughing and talking and more interested in getting good pictures than experiencing the beauty of God's creation. Didn't they know this was a high, holy moment?

Others of you, I know, have had mountaintop moments and experiences with the Lord, on the Walk to Emmaus. I have heard over and over again how on that weekend you realized the depth of God's love for you like you had never known it before.

Still others, I am sure, experienced that high, holy moment when you held your baby in your arms for the very first time. You knew love so pure and holy, that it could only remind you of the way God feels about you.

Oh, I could go on and on. What a gift mountaintop experiences are for us! They fill us, reassure us, encourage us, remind us that God is on the throne, He loves us and all is well. Indeed, they change us, like they changed Moses and those three disciples – sometimes, hopefully, in such a way that people look at us and know that something is different about us.

But, as in the case in these two lessons, mountaintop experiences come to an end at some point. As much as you'd like them to continue, life brings us back down the mountain. Life brought Moses back down the mountain, and as we heard last week, into the face of murmuring and complaining much of the time. Don't you know that Moses was thinking, "Oh, if only they had seen what I saw, if only they knew the God I met up there, the God for whom nothing is impossible."

And the disciples too, despite their protestations, had to come back down the mountain and right away, life smacked them in the face. Because the very next

verses in Luke tell us that a crowd had gathered to see Jesus, and in that crowd was a father distraught over his son who was plagued by life threatening seizures and convulsions.

So from a mountaintop spiritual high where all was as good as it would ever get, they come down the mountain and stare into the pain-filled face of a suffering child and his agonized father.

And just like that, in the blink of an eye, all of them – Moses and the disciples – had reality smack them in the face. From the highest of highs, to the lowest of lows.

But here's the rub. They do not face these situations as they might have before they went up their mountains. The Good News of the Gospel is that now they see them in a new light. Now, they can see them with hope and possibility, instead of utter despair. Now, they can see that sadness and sorrow, murmuring and complaining, sickness and suffering, will not have the final word – because the God they encountered on those mountaintops is in control, and will make all things well. God will make a way. They know it as well as they know their own names.

The God that they met on that mountain will make a way through whatever life brings.

And so he does. We know he made a way for Moses and the Hebrew people. He made a way for them to get to the promised land – a land flowing with milk and honey. He brought them through all their struggles, their hunger, their thirst. He made a way.

And that little boy – Jesus healed him. He cleansed that little body of the seizures and convulsions, so he was able to jump up into the arms of his loving father.

Friends, that's what mountaintop moments do – they fill us with the sure knowledge and love of the Lord in such a way that when we come down off of those mountains and the reality of life smacks us in the face, we don't give up. Because we know that God is on the throne, God is in control, and God can always make a way – even when we can't see it.

I daresay, there are many, many people who need to hear that especially today in the wake of the actions of our denomination's General Conference this week. No matter how you feel about the decisions made – whether you are happy that the denomination voted for the Traditional Plan, or heartbroken because they didn't vote for the One Church Plan, I think it's safe to say that we're all hurting, because the United Methodist Church as we've known it, is no more.

We don't really know what the future will look like, but it will quite possibly see some United Methodist churches leaving the denomination.

We do know that a lot of people were hurt – by people doubting their faith, by people questioning their motives, by people so easily and carelessly identifying people as sinners, not children of God.

Right now, we've come down the mountain and into the valley of the aftermath of General Conference, so now more than ever, we need to cling to the God of the mountain, as did Moses, as did the disciples. We need to cling to the God through whom all things are possible, the God who can make a way when we can't see it, the God who can heal all. If, indeed, we have been changed by his love in

Christ Jesus, then we need to trust in that love in these moments of struggle for our denomination. We need to trust that God can make a way through the chaos, the hurt can be healed, and all is not lost.

We dare not give up on God – the God of resurrection power. Who would have thought, in those dark hours before Easter, when evil had done its worst and taken away our Savior, that just three days later, he would rise from the dead? If God can do that, what is there that God cannot do? Nothing.

So let us stay the course and be the people God calls us to be. Let us revel in those mountaintop moments and then lean on him in times of struggle like these. And let us stay here, and continue to partner with him towards a new future for the United Methodist Church, a church as God alone wants it to be.

In your bulletin, you'll see an insert containing a letter from our Bishop – Peggy Johnson. On it, you'll see a prayer that was prayed at the end of the General Conference. I'd like us to pray that prayer together right now.

**The church is not ours but Yours, O God.
Use it however You desire, rank it however
You inspire.
Activate it, allow it to struggle.
Use it to demonstrate Your glory,
or let it be diminished so that You alone are praised.
Lift it up or bring it low,
whatever is more useful to Your
mission of salvation.
Let the church be full, let it be empty.
Let it have it all, let it have nothing.
We freely and heartily yield the church to You
To enjoy what is Yours or to change what is Yours.
Open Your church to the fresh breezes
of Your Spirit.
Baptize Your church afresh with the rushing
waters of Your Spirit.
Renew, Revive, Renovate, Revitalize Your church,
Blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**