

Luke 9:28-36  
March 3, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Oh, to have been Peter, James, or John on top of that mountain? How cool would it been to be present when suddenly Jesus' face and clothes changed to the most dazzling and bright white one could ever imagine? And if that wasn't enough, in appearance were also Moses, the one God gave the law to and used to lead the people to freedom and into the Promised Land in what is known as the Exodus and Elijah, another great prophet, who God used to challenge and bring down false gods of his day and who was whisked away to heaven in a whirlwind of chariots and horses of fire. Who wouldn't have wanted to be there?

Yet, I often feel like the other 9 who did not traverse to the top of the mountain with Jesus. We never hear why Jesus chose to leave them behind in the valley below or what they were doing as the others witnessed this awe-inspiring moment of Divine glory high atop the mountain. Why didn't they get to partake of this "mountaintop" experience and be left with a wonderful story to tell?

I am certain some of us gathered may have had our own "mountaintop" experiences; yet, experience of working with God's people and listening to their stories tells me many have not and long for some revelation such as this. Our journeys often seem void of any radiant encounters of Christ glowing in our midst on a glorious mountaintop; but rather we are left twisting and turning through the lowlands of life where we encounter a multitude of circumstances and situations. At times, it even may seem a drudgery.

And maybe that is the reason Jesus left the other 9 behind. Perhaps, He knew we might be able to relate more to them when at times in our journey of faith we feel like we too are left behind and aren't invited to accompany Him to the mountaintop.

Many summers ago, our family took a vacation to the Great Smoky Mountains. I recall the day we walked up a rather steep trail and finally reached the highest point of the Smokey Mountains. Quite literally, we stood in the center of clouds and could watch them roll in. It was a majestic and awe-inspiring experience to be in that place in the beauty of God's creation. I could certainly see why mountaintops were thought of in ancient times as the primary place of God's presence.

Yet, as wonderful as it was, most of our time was spent at the base of the mountain hiking trails that wandered through trees and crossed over streams and rocks. Some of the most beautiful pictures we took were of waterfalls located deep within the woods at the lowest point of the mountains. And I will never forget the radiance of the kids faces when we came upon a ranger and a group of people all standing with eyes wide open watching a bear cub high atop a tree foraging for food. It was one of those moments you want to hold on to; a majestic experience of the awesome beauty of God's creation.

Jesus and the disciples do eventually come down the mountain and immediately experience the realities of life in the flesh as the verses following our passage reveal an encounter with a father in desperation begging Jesus to heal his son bound by a demon. Jesus witnesses the pain of evil and illness, is present amid it and ultimately causes the demon to depart the young boy and leaving "all astounded at the greatness of God." (v.43); giving testament to the fact the glory of God does not rest only high atop a mountain.

While we may often feel like the 9 disciples left behind down in the valley, Luke gives us good news that God's greatness surrounds us and even meets us in those valleys of life. Those 9 will join the other 3 to journey with Jesus to where God will ultimately reveal Jesus' true glory. We too are invited on the 40-day journey beginning this Wednesday as we walk with Jesus to the foot of the cross. This is the last place the world expects to find the glory of God, but our God often chooses means that defy human comprehension in expressing God's love and grace. This is His "departure" that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus were talking about on the mountain. This is His "exodus". This is God's defining act in

redeeming God's children, in freeing them from the hand of sin, of opening to them the way of everlasting life and the promised land of God's unending love. Christ's death and resurrection are where all God's people gather to witness the greatness of God!

Maybe you do often long to find yourself on the mountaintop with Peter, James and John longing for a glorious story to share with others. But I suspect Jesus had his reasons for leaving the others behind. I imagine there was work to be done in preparation for their journey to Jerusalem. I imagine Jesus needed them to meet the needs of the crowds who had been following them. I imagine He needed them to teach, heal, and bring near the presence of the kingdom of God to those gathered with them in the valley. And just as we so often do at the base of the mountain, in the lowlands of life, I imagine they had their own encounters in which the glory of God was revealed and changed their lives for the better. Perhaps it was a meal shared, a thank you hug from someone they prayed with, the miracle of a new life born, the grandeur of the stars shining in the night sky, or simply the sense of accomplishment and worth that comes in knowing they were doing the work Jesus had called them to do.

Our time in the valley is important. There is work yet to be done. There are encounters with Jesus yet to be had and stories that need to be told of just how amazing is his love and grace.