

((Mountains We Climb))

Our Old Testament scripture is **Exodus 24:12-18**, I am reading from the Common English Bible. Listen now for the word of the Lord:

12 The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. I’ll give you the stone tablets with the instructions and the commandments that I’ve written in order to teach them.” 13 So Moses and his assistant Joshua got up, and Moses went up God’s mountain. 14 Moses had said to the elders, “Wait for us here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur will be here with you. Whoever has a legal dispute may go to them.”

15 Then Moses went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16 The Lord’s glorious presence settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day, the Lord called to Moses from the cloud. 17 To the Israelites, the Lord’s glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain. 18 Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. ((This is the Word of the Lord)) ((Thanks be to God))

Our New Testament scripture is **Matthew 17:1-9**, listen now for the word of the Lord:

17 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. 2 He was transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his

clothes became as white as light. 3 Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Lord, it’s good that we’re here. If you want, I’ll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5 While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!” 6 Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe.

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 commanded them, “Don’t tell anybody about the vision until the Human One is raised from the dead.” ((This is the Word of the Lord)) ((Thanks be to God))

Sermon:

Have you ever stood at the base of a mountain, looked up and knew that what was waiting at the top was going to be worth it, even though every moment getting there would be horrible? I remember this feeling well from being a kid. My parents live in the same house we grew up in and it’s in a neighborhood that has a fair amount of hills. As children, there was this one hill- we called it Terror Hill. We would ride our bikes up Terror Hill to come home from the neighborhood pool. It was the last hill before turning onto our street and riding down the equally steep hill all the way to our driveway. Sitting at the bottom

of that hill (which, to be fair, now seems very climbable) we looked up and knew that ride down would be awesome- sailing into the driveway after barely touching the bike's brakes on the way down, it was going to be incredible. But knowing that first, we had to ride up Terror Hill made us question every part of going to the pool in the first place.

So, we're sitting at the base of this hill and we knew it was going to be hard. We knew every moment of it was going to make our legs burn, and we were already exhausted from the long ride to that point of the neighborhood. So, we started. Every day we rode so slowly up Terror Hill. And every time we got to the top, turning down our street and flying to our driveway, that climb was entirely worth it.

In both of our passages today, we find people climbing a mountain. To be fair, our stories don't include bike rides around a neighborhood they grew up around. They don't include having a full day of pool fun before going home for a snack. However, at some point, I am sure that Moses, Jesus, Peter, James, and John stood at the base of their mountains and contemplated if it was really worth climbing all the way up there. What would be waiting at the top of that climb? Would it actually make sense to climb up there or would it be easier to just stay at the bottom and wait for whatever was up there to come down?

These passages are meant to be written similarly, it's actually exactly what the author of Matthew was doing when he wrote it, referencing Exodus through the entire passage. When the other Gospel

writers discuss the Transfiguration of Jesus, there are different points that are brought up. Mark writes about Peter stumbling over his words and offering to build tents for the three figures he sees. Luke writes about the disciples nearly being overcome by sleep, but being able to stay awake long enough to see the other figures come near. These stories are similar, and both look intentionally at how the top of the mountain could have gone. However, in our scripture today, Matthew seems to focus a little longer at the Glory of God that is waiting for them at the top of the mountain- which is a clear reference to the Exodus passage of this morning.

God is waiting for Moses and for Jesus at the top of the mountains they climb. And it is important that God presents in the same ways- light, glory, a bright cloud that covered the mountain top and obscured anyone else's view from seeing what was happening on the mountain. But within that cloud of glory, power, and light God gives the most incredible gifts. The first, to Moses, on top of Mt. Siani, God gifted the Law. The Ten Commandments. The second mountain, which is never named, Jesus is given a clear sign that the Spirit is within and around him. Humanity also receives the gift that is Jesus, being named once more by God as Their son, with whom God is very pleased. Humanity and the disciples are reminded- not so subtly that Jesus is the Son of God.

So, what mountains are we being asked to climb? They can't all be as easy to conquer as a hill at a childhood home. Often they are

bigger mountains as adults. Maybe it's a problem you've been trying to figure out forever. Maybe it's a conflict with someone else that has been weighing on you. Maybe there is something you've been wanting to do for a long time and you just need one push to finally do it. There are many mountains in front of us, there are so many times that we only see obstacles in our way. I truly believe Moses felt those reservations too. I believe that Jesus, Peter, James, and John looked up and contemplated just staying at the bottom of the mountain, waiting it out and seeing if God would come down there. But instead, they climbed to the top of the hill to meet God. But this climb was not quick. This mission didn't happen in a couple of minutes or hours, even as children- we were able to climb Terror Hill in about 10 minutes, tops.

But for Moses, this climb- this mountain top experience, took 6 full days and that was before he actually entered the presence of God for 40 days and 40 nights! He knew it would be a slow process, he left Aaron and Hur in charge and said if there were legal problems, to go to them. Moses knew this wasn't going to be a quick, 10-minute hike. And then we get to Jesus and the disciples. We don't know exactly how long the climb was, but it seems like they are up on the mountain for a fair amount of time. The next passage in Luke refers to the next day before the disciples and Jesus come down the mountain.

What happens on those mountains is important though, we aren't climbing mountains just to be on top of them here. There are

gifts at the top that are so worth that climb. And they are cloaked in the presence of God. Moses receives the gifts of the law and the commandments. He spends 40 days within the cloud of God. And afterward, he comes back down the mountain to the Israelites to give the gifts to them and they have already broken the commandments. This gift was just given to humanity, and as Moses walks down the mountain, he finds the Israelites worshiping a golden calf.

On top of the mountain during Jesus's Transfiguration humanity was given a second gift. While that gift is a little less tangible, humanity received the gift of Jesus's divinity. But there was also a moment of fear on top of the mountain. When Jesus's skin starts shining like the sun, in this passage, Peter starts offering to build shrines for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Our scripture says, "While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!'" Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe," (verses 5-6). So, suddenly, the gift of Jesus being the Son of God caused fear and awe. But Jesus offers one more gift to his disciples. He reaches out. "Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'" Jesus saw his disciple's fear and immediately offered care and comfort to them.

So, this begs the question, do we climb these mountains alone? Is it our duty to look up these mountains and climb slowly up to the top? Or are there others climbing with us?

I believe the value of the Transfiguration of Jesus lies in the fact that the disciples saw it. They experienced it with Jesus, and they were comforted when they were afraid. We are not called to climb the mountains alone. Even as kids, we would encourage each other when we got tired halfway up that hill in our neighborhood. When we are climbing the mountains we are called to climb, it is necessary to be able to look to the side and see other people climbing with us. Keeping in mind that sometimes others won't quite understand the mountains we are climbing.

When Moses came down from the mountain, we know that the Israelites were already building the golden calf and Aaron was leading them. They didn't trust that Moses would come back down from the mountain he had climbed and the call he had heard. When Jesus brought the disciples with him, he told them "Don't tell anybody about the vision until the Human One is raised from the dead." Maybe that's because others would not quite understand yet what climbing the mountain had meant for them, and for Jesus.

So what do we do when we come down from the mountains we are called to climb? Moses eventually got to the place where he could teach what he had learned up on top of the mountain- admittedly after a bit of a fit over the golden calf. But eventually, he was able to continue to lead and use the lessons God had given him. A similar thing happened when Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain. While Jesus was physically changed, and the disciples could

see that his skin shined in a new way, they were still challenged to understand Jesus's ministry in a new way. Jesus was about to start his journey to the cross and the last months of his life. Still, coming down from the mountain, Jesus and the disciples taught what they experienced on the top of the mountain.

There are mountains we are called to climb, there are things in this life we are meant to fight for and things to fight against. Those mountains don't have to be climbed alone, and when we reach the top, we may find things that scare us, or we may find things that we have to learn. However, we will absolutely also find God at the top of these mountains because God is the one that is calling us to climb them in the first place. And when we come back down, we must teach others about our experiences and the lessons we've learned.

Please pray with me,

Holy God, we come to you knowing that you're calling us to climb our own mountains. You have called your children before to your mountains and you have met your children at the top. We ask that you meet us at the top of our mountains, we ask that you find us when we wander and that you lead us in your plan.

In your most holy name, Amen.