

Sunday, February 7, 2016

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalms 99 (819 VU)

Luke 9:28-36

### Mountain View Experiences

There was a chemical plant which recently caught on fire. Several area fire departments responded to the blaze and there were many people gathered around the area watching. People became aware of the fire through social media carrying the story. At one point a reporter was interviewing the president of the company as he was frantic. He had spoken to the firefighters and the media then shared why he was so frantic. In the midst of the inferno of the chemical plant was a safe that contained all the company's super-sensitive documents including the top secret formula for their best selling products. He told the reporter that he would give a \$500,000 donation to the fire department that brought the fire under control and saved all the super sensitive documents in the safe.

Unfortunately the blaze was spreading quickly and the fire continued to emit huge plumes of smoke which was seen for miles away. The different fire departments from around the city worked in shifts and the community brought in food to support their efforts. However, the fire continued to burn. After a while another siren in the distance sounded and this old beat up dilapidated 1930's style fire engine filled with older retired fire fighters came roaring through the crowd, past all the fire departments and into the blazing fire of the chemical plant. The truck burst right through the front door and right into the middle of the building. Everyone gasped about the action these people took. Before long, the fire was under control and this group of older firefighters emerged from the plan and were coughing as they heard the crowd cheering them on and thanking them for their effort. They saved the safe and its important documents!

A few hours later at a press conference, the president of the company handed the 82 year old fire chief a check for \$500,000. One reporter asked the chief what they planned to do with the money. The answer, "These guys already told me that they want to buy a new fire engine that has some brakes."

I share with you this story for 2 reasons. I thought it was funny and secondly because this story like many others have two levels to it. The first level is what happened- the facts of what occurred (W5+H) which are often pretty bare. What adds to these facts are the motivation, and the rational thinking that occurs. And this is the case for both our readings today. The story of Moses radiantly descending from the mountain after receiving the 10 Commandments and Jesus' transfiguration upon the mountain with Peter James and John becoming a part of our story if we witness to our faith and believe in the Christ who came to us in Jesus and was revealed as God's Son in what he said and did.

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai his face was radiant and glowing but he did not know this. When he returned to speak to the people they were afraid to get close because they were not sure that it was really Moses nor why he was glowing. But when Moses spoke, they realized that it really was him and so they calmed down and listened. Moses then shared with the people of Israel the commands that God had given for the people to follow and know how to live. They people understood that Moses

had been in God's presence and because of God's glory and light- Moses is bright, glorious and radiant. Why? Because he was immersed in God's glory. He is not sunburned per se but ultimately glowing because he is reflecting God's light. Moses then decides that in order to protect the people from his bright presence he would cover his face with a veil in their presence. But in God's presence he would remove the veil and again he would reflect God's glory and light.

Why is this story of Moses' radiant mountain experience important for us today as we focus on Christ's transfiguration? Because this story enables us to understand God's glory and that Jesus is revealed once again as the Son of God, radiant and glorious as well.

Jesus' transfiguration story takes place a little over a week after Peter and Jesus have had a serious discussion about Jesus' relationship with the people. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" They replied- "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others say one of the prophets of long ago come back to life." But then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter confesses his faith in Jesus when he states, "the Christ of God."

So Jesus a little over a week later takes Peter, James and John up onto a mountain to pray. Jesus is praying when something happens to Jesus. His face changes, his clothes become bright. Imagine being there to see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. But why did this happen and what is God telling us through these events?

God is telling us at least three important matters one of which is to look at our theology. That is to think about God as a Christian. As a follower of Jesus everything you do in life is based on your theological understanding. If you have bad theology (think wrong things about God) it can make you believe wrong things, which affects the way you live. Good theology helps us to view the world with God's vision in mind—of love, peace joy and hope.

In the story of the Transfiguration, the 3 disciples witness Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah two of the most important people in Jewish history. Moses- the law-giver and Elijah the prophet. Elijah was a prophet who did not die because he was so good. What does Jesus, Moses and Elijah talk about? God and the fulfilment of his plan for the people through Jesus. God had planned to send Jesus to earth before creation, The old testament law and the prophets point to the one who is to come—Jesus. God is in control and he is completely faithful to accomplish everything He wants to do. His purpose never fails. We know this because we read in Luke that Jesus Moses and Elijah speak "about his departure which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem."

God is also revealing Jesus in all his majesty and wonder. Matthew Mark and Luke each share this story but seem frustrated as to how to describe what occurred. Jesus being transfigured is indescribable- face shone like the sun, clothes are whiter than anything bleached like a flash of lightning. Transfigured is from the same Greek word we get the word 'metamorphosis'- the same process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, spinning a cocoon and then being seemingly transformed from one creature to another. Jesus was seen by these disciples as God in the flesh. A cloud then envelops the disciples and they were probably afraid. It would have been startling and unnerving at this point because they not only see Jesus changed, they also then hear the voice of God coming from this cloud, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." Then all of a sudden nothing. They find Jesus alone

on the mountainside just as he was before- praying. How comforting this would have been after the fear that they had at first! Their perspective would have changed not only just the power and majesty but also the love He had for them.

From this story we relate with God with the privilege of intimacy. Jesus is very close to these 3 followers Peter, James and John and by taking them up the mountain to experience God's glory and majesty they have moved even closer. Jesus counts them as friends but also as those on whom he should be able to rely upon for not sharing this story with others but also for being with Jesus when he would need them the most.

Think about your own friendships- not those on Facebook where you might state what you had for supper last night; but those friendships where you share confidential matters face to face. Those are the friendships that matter. A favourite hymn describes a special relationship we might have with Jesus:

What a friend we have in Jesus- all our sins and griefs to bear  
What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer.

But what kind of friendship is this when you share only your sin, your grief and concerns? What is your level of intimacy that you have with Jesus?

Social media today skews real relationships when you have hundreds of 'friends' or you can tweet to millions in seconds about your amazing dessert. Yet it is the relationship of trust and love that is most important between the few we call family or our closest friendships near or far away from us. You know the kinds of friendships I refer to. When you can email or write or call a friend after 6 months and the relationship just picks up right where it left off. Why? Because there is a history of shared experiences a sense of trust a feeling mutual support.

Jesus, Peter, James and John have this kind of relationship which was fully experienced and raised to a more intimate level on the mountain top. Through witnessing Jesus' transfiguration and seeing him speak with Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John see Jesus in his glory and preparing to do what God had in mind for many years and generations. This experience they share enables the disciples to see Jesus for who he really is—the son of God, the Christ of God just as Peter told Jesus 8 days before.

Our world seems to have lost this 'privilege' of intimacy. Through social media and business we have loss the formality of calling each other by a more formal way of sharing. It used to be that people would never think of calling another person by their first name until they were invited to do so. When you first met someone, you referred to them as "Sir" or 'Ma'am." If you spoke to them specifically you might call them by their name, but only Mr. Suchandsuch or Miss Soandso. In those bygone days the only time you would dream of calling someone by their first name was if they gave you permission to do so. That was a privilege of intimacy reserved for only the closest of friends.

Today for the most part we have done away with that kind of formality. I don't think that's all bad, but I do notice a problem. The casualness of our relationships causes us to take intimacy for granted and for better or worse it is a fact of life. This also occurs when people relate to God in casual ways- "man upstairs, big guy in the sky' . Yet Jesus is not to be taken casually even by his most devout

followers, believers and disciples. He is the Alpha, Omega, creator and sustainer of the universe. Peter James and John did not take their relationship with Jesus for granted.

They would have marveled that the Son of God spent time with them- in the flesh. What a privilege indeed to have a relationship with Jesus that is close and even more amazing is that Jesus wants you to draw even more closely to him, to be in a relationship that is not casual but fully involved. He will lead and guide your life- if you invite him to do so. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

The mountain view experience of Moses was witness to God's glory and when he returned to his people, Moses' life had been forever changed as he veiled himself in the presence for the people. Peter James and John's mountain view experience was not in looking down on the valley below but having a glimpse of what was to come and to know Jesus this One who they called the Christ as their teacher, leader, healer and master, but mostly as the one whom they loved as the Son of God. They were gifted on the mountain to experience Jesus.

This privilege is also offered to us by God. When you come to understand Jesus, the Son of God and when you realize who you are in relationship with him- a sinful, human, self- centred creature, what an amazing gift we can have with Jesus the Christ who becomes for each of us- our Saviour- as we grow in faith and trust Him to guide us through this life as we prepare for the next.

Let us pray:

Holy God we praise you and yearn to be closer to you through our faith. We give thanks for Jesus whom you revealed as your Son in different ways. Help us now to believe for we know that Jesus prays for us so that we will no longer sin, so that we will have a constant supply of Spirit and are anointed anew and that one day we will all gather be forever in his arms as his faithful followers. May we experience your glory and grace as we too have mountain top experiences and yearn to see your glory in all its wonder. Amen.