

Sunday, February 23, 2020

Exodus 24:12-18

Matthew 17:1-9

Called up to the Mountain

Just take a few minutes and think back to your elementary or secondary school days. Were you ever called to go to the Principal's office? Did you know why you were called through the in class phones or public address system before you arrived there? Maybe this is a distinct memory for you because you had been called more than once and for different reasons. You knew that if you had done something wrong this is why you would be going. But what about if you had not? What if the principal wanted to just share something with you-either good or bad and not based on your behaviour? The anxiety levels of anyone being called to the office, being asked to see the boss in his/her office, or even being called to explain something you did or did not do is something we all experience in lives. Of course it makes a difference for the reasons for the call but this in itself was often a deterrent for others to behaviour. A part of this was that years ago, the principal had the power to use a strap for bad behaviour. Today this is no longer the case. Yet the anxiety for being called to a person of authority still exists with each one of us for we are all accountable to another if not many people.

In Exodus 24, Moses is called up to the mountain by God and told to wait for God was going to give him tablets of stone with the law and instructions inscribed on them. So Moses and Joshua set out together. But then Moses went up further and a cloud covered the mountain. One can only imagine what Moses was thinking not to mention Joshua who went to assist him. The glory of the Lord shone on the mountain for 6 days and on the seventh God called Moses up further. We are not told what Moses and Joshua did in those days but Moses further up the mountain and was there a long time- 40 days and 40 nights. We assume that Joshua went back down the mountain after all Moses was with God and safe. And it is during this time that Moses receives the instructions on how the people are to live as they journey to the Promised Land.

Can you imagine Moses up the mountain? Seeing God's glory and wondering what he was to do next? Joshua must have experienced something as well but the narrative does not focus on him. Moses is there a long time and waits on the mountainside knowing that this experience will be something to hold onto forever.

We too are called to have mountaintop experiences in our faith journey as well because are invited to take a look at our lives from a different perspective—God's. What would God say

about you right now? Would he welcome you to further discussion about your life plan and His plan for your life and how they might be different or even similar?

Jesus invites Peter and James and John to go hiking up the side of a mountain. They sit down and next thing they know— Jesus transfigures before them. He transforms, he changes, he is different from when he walked on the hike. His clothes are dazzling white, his face is shining brightly like the sun. Suddenly appearing before them all is Moses and Elijah and they are talking. Peter sees the opportunity as a talking time— not a time of reflection because he really does not know what is happening. Just like those moments when you went to the principal's office and it was not for bad behaviour. Peter is not sure what he sees and so he says, "Jesus, it is great to be here. I'll make 3 dwellings— one for you, Elijah and Moses."

In life, we experience many moments that overwhelm us and are incomprehensible. Reflect on some of those days— when your children were born. When your loved one died. When world history changed because of terrorism—Sept 11, 2001. But what about those moments which cause tears of joy— seeing children walk the first time, ride their bikes, drive a car, graduate, marry. There are mountaintop and valley moments throughout life. We are never ready for them. They arrive unannounced changing us in irreversible ways. But there is one thing they all have in common. They demand that we be silent and listen. These moments have something to say to us, to teach us.

But like Peter we often respond babbling absurdities because we cannot understand the significant, the meaningful moment. When Peter does finally quit talking nonsense a cloud appears, envelopes them, and the voice of God gives this instruction to Peter, James, and John: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" That's it. Very short. To the point. What Peter said made no sense. What God said had a mountain of meaning. Throughout the season after Epiphany we have been discussing how to become new in Jesus Christ. For this to occur we need to know Jesus. And in this transfiguration story it is God who says, "This Is My Son." The disciples have witnessed healings, teaching of thousands, miracles of food shared and yet God makes it very clear at the mountain. This is my son. There should not be any doubt about where Jesus came from or who he is. Secondly God says, "Whom I love". God loves you too. Remember why God sent Jesus to earth, because he loved the world so much he sent His Son to change the world and that people would believe in him and live forever. Then God says, "Listen to him." God was concerned that the disciples did not 'get' it— the message of who Jesus is and why he came. He wants to be certain that the disciples follow his teachings and support him in what is to come. Yet they of course do not believe that Jesus will suffer and die. Even though he has been teaching this to them. But they are not listening. Yet on the mountain

God's cloud then slips away; Moses and Elijah are gone and Jesus appears like a regular guy. But the disciples know this is one of those moments of revelation that give them something to hold on to for the rest of their lives. They were in God's presence and fall on the ground and afraid. Jesus then comes to them and touches them, and says, "Get up. Don't be afraid. Time to go home." When they looked up- they saw only Jesus who looked normal. As they were walking down the side of the mountain Jesus states, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the death." They then acknowledged what he said and hiked together.

Have you ever experienced this kind of moment with God/ Jesus or the Holy Spirit? What this involves is when God becomes real to us, and we know beyond any doubt that Jesus is our Living Lord and Saviour. This can take place on the side of a hill, kneeling in prayer or as you walk the ocean floor. It can happen in the midst of praising God in a time of worship or it can be when you are talking with another believer and God's Spirit reaches to you both. And we should not be afraid of them but welcome them. For when we experience God in all his Holy Mystery or cannot see the value of the experience until later on, we are truly his children in faith. We must not babble like Peter wanting to contain the scene, but to stop and let our senses fully express what it is we are experiencing. What are we seeing, tasting, feeling, hearing and touching?

And to experience such spiritual mountaintops means that we are truly called by God to know Jesus His, Son and to follow what he says. When God's spirit touches you, you are never the same. When the disciples witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus, and heard God's voice, they were never the same again. Let us remember this as we give thanks for this story of light and life. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.