

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

14 February 2021

Transfiguration Sunday (Last Sunday before Lent) – Mark 9:2-9

I'm going to share with you a few reflections from our first Lesson, the book of Jeremiah, and will talk about: **Lessons from the Mountain-Top**

Let us pray:

Sermon:

On April 3rd, 1968, a young Baptist preacher seeking justice for all, stood behind a pulpit in Memphis, Tennessee in the United States, and declared at the end of the speech, "I've been to the mountain top and I've seen the promised land."

He had probably been inspired by many characters in the bible who had had such mysterious experiences. One of them would have been Prophet Elijah that we read about in the first lesson. Before he was taken up, Elijah had had a number of encounters with God and had been mightily used by God, so much so that the authorities of the day wanted to eliminate him. His spirit was troubled and he eventually ran away to the Mount of Horeb, where he had an encounter with God in a small still voice of encouragement.

Many people in the bible had dramatic experiences of encounter with God on mountain tops or on elevated places. This was mainly so because their understanding of geography in those times was that the universe was organised

into three tiers: there was the underworld where the dead would go; then came the earth – where the living were located; then on top was heaven, which was the place where God or the Divine lived. This was the three-tier geography through which people understood the universe. As such, people understood that if one goes on the mountain top or on an elevated place, they would have moved closest to where they could have an encounter with God.

But whether people take this literally or symbolically, this is a very crucial matter to the life of a Christian because these moments of special encounter with God are moments that God intends for God’s children to have. These moments are meant to achieve certain purposes in the lives of God’s children.

In our gospel lesson, Mark tells us that Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, and led them up the mountain top. And this happened “six days later.” The question is, what had happened six days earlier? In chapter 8 Mark tells us that Jesus had begun to teach his disciples that “the Son of man must undergo great suffering, and eventually be killed, and after three days rise again.” But this had not sat down well with them. They could not imagine that the man of such power would end up getting killed; they even tried to talk him out of this bizarre plan, but he had pushed back. So it had been a tough week for the disciples as they tried to wrap their heads around this unsettling news.

But at the mountain top something phenomenal happened. Mark says that Jesus “was transfigured before them.” His appearance suddenly changed and even his clothes became dazzling white – the white they had never been seen before. There was great confusion because they were both terrified and fascinated at the same time.

One of the lessons we pick from this experience is that mountain top experiences sometimes bring both terror and fascination in us. One time I was involved in accident in Botswana. When I came out of the car that had overturned, I was terrified by the sight of the wreckage, but at the same time I was awestruck by God’s power to save life from danger. Such are the moments in which we witness in a more pronounced way the consuming power of God and the saving power of God.

Because there are two sides to God’s self revelation – one side that terrifies the hack out of us – just as Isaiah was terrified when he saw God high and exalted and began to cry, “woe to me... I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips...” Then the other side that is lovely and attractive. It’s just like the water systems that are set up in our homes to access water from sources such as Saskatchewan River. We cannot have the whole river in the house, otherwise the force of the flow of the river drowns us. This is how God has interacted with humanity; God, in Christ Jesus, has transformed Godself so that

God is accessible to us. And so, at Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples experienced the naked God, just like the Israelites were terrified when they saw Moses' shining face when he descended from the mountain, such that they had to cover his face with a cloth.

There are a number of moments in our lives when God becomes a naked and terrifying God. But in Jesus Christ, this God can become a God whom we can access. But this is the nature of the mountain-top experience in which God sometimes allows us to have a glimpse of this side of God.

When the disciples saw the drama that had unfolded before them, and thought they were terrified, they were so fascinated that they wanted to camp there. Which brings us to another lesson from the Mountain top.