

“It Is Good To Be Here”  
Luke 9:28-36  
February 27, 2022

This is a special week in our church’s history. It was 21 years ago this week that our church had its first worship service. I still remember the excitement of that day as 125 people gathered for worship at the local roller skating rink to start the first Lutheran Church in Johnston County. Months of work went into planning for that first worship service and when it was over I was so happy that I didn’t want the celebration to end. But I quickly realized that I couldn’t just stay there in that moment for very long, because we had to do this all over again next Sunday and now we had only a week to prepare for worship instead of several months.

I’m sure we’ve all had exciting moments like that in our lives, such as your graduation from a school, your wedding day, or the birth of your child, moments that are so exciting that you don’t want to let them go, you don’t want them to end, because for a little while everything seems to be perfect. We often call those moments “mountaintop” experiences, because they’re exciting, exhilarating, and full of joy, but they certainly don’t last forever.

Graduation is exciting, but eventually we have to get a job and start a career that may involve some long hours and challenging work. Remember your wedding day? If yours was like mine, it was an incredible experience, but no matter how hard Sue and I try to look at each other with the same sparkle in our eyes that was there when we stood together on that mountaintop of our wedding day, things have changed. We are different people than we were on that day, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. Living together as husband and wife or as a family means getting to know more and more about each other, and allowing for growth and change. Children change, as well. 16 year-olds ask questions that never came up when they were infants; and the more we

try to stay there on that mountain seeing our children as little bundles of joy that never argued, never challenged, and never disobeyed, the more we miss.

Mountain top experiences are always exciting because of the high emotional level on which we operate, but that fact is we have to come back down. It is necessary for us to return to the daily routine to evaluate and learn from the mountain top experience, and that's what Peter, James, and John in our Gospel lesson for today had to learn, not only about themselves, but also about Jesus.

One week before Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain to reveal to them that He really was God's Son in the flesh, He told them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Now this sounded really strange to the disciples. It would be like the President of Ukraine telling the citizens of his country that in order for them to eventually win this war they must first lose some battles. That doesn't make sense. So Peter took Jesus aside and said to Him, "Never, Lord, this shall never happen to you." But Jesus knew what was ahead. He knew what was coming: ridicule, rejection, His arrest, a trial, suffering, and death. So a week later, Jesus took His closest friends – Peter, James, and John – with Him up to the top of a mountain to pray. He needed some time away from the challenges of every day life in order to talk to His Heavenly Father and to be strengthened for what was ahead of Him.

But as they were praying on top of that mountain, all of a sudden the appearance of Jesus' face began to change and His clothes became dazzling white. At this moment Jesus' true identity was being revealed. He was God in the flesh. Jesus was the human face of God. It was in Jesus that God revealed himself to the world. Then Moses and Elijah, from the Old Testament, guys who had been dead for over 1000 years appeared with Jesus. Peter was overwhelmed. Being on top of that mountain with the Son of God and 2 great prophets was incredible. So not wanting to

lose this moment, Peter says in verse 33, “Lord, it is good to be up here. Why don’t we put up 3 tents right here on this mountain so everyone can stay?”

But before Peter could finish his sentence, God the Father interrupted him. A cloud appeared and covered them. And a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” But as soon as God spoke, it was over. The cloud, Moses, Elijah, and the bright garments were gone. And the next day, Jesus led those 3 disciples back down from the mountain top to the valley, where the life of discipleship was lived out. In fact, mountaintop experiences often occur only in relationship with the valleys of life, because it is in life’s valleys that most of us grow. We grow as a result of having to struggle with good and bad. We grow as a result of having to crawl and fight our way out of life’s valleys.

Jesus knew His disciples would soon see Him suffer and die, so out of His great love for them He took them to the top of a mountain to strengthen their faith and to prepare them for that moment when the light of the world would be hidden by the darkness of sin, evil, and death on Good Friday. Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a taste of heaven so that they would know and believe that He really was the Son of God.

But why doesn’t Jesus do something like that for all of us today? After all, aren’t there times when we need a boost in our faith? I know that Jesus promises to be with us always, but sometimes it may feel like we’re all alone in this world. I know that Jesus is in control of all things, but sometimes when I see what a mess this world is in – with all of the senseless killings and tragedies or maybe when we look at our own lives and see things that are out of control or all of the sins we commit, sometimes we forget that Jesus is in control or we may find it hard to believe that Jesus really forgives us and loves us.

So where is the mountain that we can climb to get a taste of heaven? Where can we go to make our faith stronger when we are hurting? The answer is right here, where God's word is shared, where His love is experienced through others, and where we receive His forgiveness through the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion. That is the value of being together in person for worship here in this place.

This Wednesday we will begin the season of the church year known as Lent; and one of the mysteries of the Lenten season is the message that God's victory in Christ came in the agony of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. I don't know if we will ever fully understand what that means for us, but Jesus' journey through His valley of suffering tells us something about God. Lent tells us that the suffering of death and the hurt of failure are where we find God's presence. God certainly stands with us on our mountaintop experiences, but God is also the one who holds us up, who strengthens and supports us, as we make our way out of the valleys of hardships and suffering.

Thank God Jesus did not stay on that mountain like Peter suggested, because if He had, sin and death never would have been dealt with. So Jesus came down, to deal with our doubts, our pains, and our fears. He came down knowing He would have to climb up another mountain, and not with His disciples, but with a cross on His back. He came down and suffered and died for all the sins and the mess that make up this world.

Some of you may be sad or hurting today, and maybe you're clinging to a mountaintop experience from your past to help you get through your difficulties, and that's OK. We need to grieve and think and pray through our bad times; and remembering those mountaintop experiences can be very helpful, but we also need to move on, to continue our journey of life. Someday we will see Jesus and we will hear the same voice of God that Peter, James, and John

heard. But until that day, let Jesus comfort you and strengthen your faith right here. As we hear His Word to us and as we receive His body and blood in bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins, my we also say today, “Lord, it is good that we are here.”