

Call to Worship

This is the place where God is praised, and in God's light we are revealed to each other; transformed, renewed, and redeemed.

Come, let us praise God together!

Prayer of Invocation

We raise our voices, we look on high, our thoughts are sent above, to God who rules heaven and earth. But we forget that sometimes you speak through the humblest, the least of these in our midst, and that out of the mouth of babes comes wisdom. Today as we gather in your name, we pray for your word to be spoken directly in our hearts, and in everyone who shares this time of worship with us today. These things we pray, trusting in your mercy and forgiveness, confident in our hope, happy in our faith. Amen.

The Word

Mark 9:2-9 (NRSV)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. **Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.**

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Living the Word

Where I may go... I have been in many places, but I've never been in Cahoots. Apparently, you can't go alone. You have to be in Cahoots with someone. I've also never been in Cognito. I hear no one recognizes you there. I have, however, been in Sane. They don't have an airport to get there; you have to be driven there. I have made several trips there, thanks to my friends, family and work. I live close so it's a short drive.

I would like to go to Conclusions, but you have to jump, and I'm not too much on physical activity. I have also been in Doubt. That is a sad place to go, and I try not to visit there too often. I've been in Flexible, but only when it was very important to stand firm. Sometimes I'm in Capable, and I go there more often as I'm getting older.

One of my favorite places to be is in Suspense! It really gets the adrenalin flowing and pumps up the old heart! And, sometimes I think I am in Vincible but life shows me that I am not. People keep telling me I'm in Denial but I'm positive that I've never been there before! I have been in Deep-dodo many times; the older I get, the easier it is to get there.

This is a cute play on words, unless you personally have been there...And there are many more places where we may go. For the disciples on this day they are mountain climbing. While there they had a 'mountain top experience' which put them in terror – with bright lights and people who were supposed to be long dead appearing before them; it put them in awe – with the recognition of the voice of God.

This surely must be Holy Ground and they surely will have a great story to tell when they get back with the rest of the guys...Also they were in confusion – Why were they, only three of the twelve, brought on this field

trip with Jesus? In confusion, they were seeking reason; and in uncertainty – seeking purpose as to what was going on and what they should be doing.

In defense of the disciples, they had had a lot to take in already as they followed this radical teacher from place to place. He had done healing, and taught them many things through parables, that all made sense to them and helped them understand what he was truly about. He had done miracles of multiplying one small lunch to feed 5000 people; then he had walked across a raging sea to them on the water...

After all of this he asked them who they thought he really was and confirmed their new understandings about him. Though there was some tension around because of his always doing things his own way, for the most part, things were going quite well at this point. They thought that they were beginning to 'get' all of this, and then he begins a new conversation with them.

Mark 8:31-33

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

These words are what Peter, James and John have fresh in their minds and hearts as they climb the mountain. No wonder they were in terror, in awe, in confusion and in uncertainty by the events now playing out in front of them. Jesus doesn't want or need them to 'do' anything, but **just** pay attention.

The trip up the mountain was for Jesus' benefit as he faced what was ahead, knowing it was going to be hard. He received encouragement as he met there Moses, the greatest of the law-givers and Elijah, the first of the great prophets. In Jesus was the culmination of the past that they had begun in God's kingdom.

The trip up the mountain was also to give something extra special to these three disciples. They had been devastated by Jesus' statement that he was going to Jerusalem to die. It seemed backward to all that he had been teaching and leading the people to. They were carrying a burden of fear up the mountain with them and now they were in more terror, in awe, in confusion and in uncertainty of how they were to be a part of all of this.

But what they experienced up there, the mountain top experience for them would give them something to believe in and hold on to even if they couldn't understand the mystery of it all. No matter what was going to happen, they now knew that this was for sure the 'Son of God' as they had heard it directly from God. They had seen and known the glory of God before them and it was an encouragement to them that would come back to keep their faith strong for the rest of their life.

I was told at Seminary that whenever anyone in the Bible goes to a mountain, this is a 'pay attention' moment. And the 'pay attention' moment for me in all of this was, let's not get bogged down in the flash and glitz and the glamour, but in the here and now. Taking Life In: The first thing you have to do is Go! Be willing to go into the unknown with trust and faith, ready to encounter God.

I am almost always ready for a new adventure. Because we lived on the farm, I knew that as my boys grew up there would be a time when they would be needed to help all summer and I wouldn't get to have as much time with them. So I told them that they could each choose on their thirteenth birthday some place for me to take them for a 'mom & me' vacation. We would plan for a year and then go in their fourteenth year.

I had already taken them to Disney World and because it was my ideal vacation, I was sure they would choose it, too. Donald, the oldest, decided that his trip with mom would include a week at a working cattle ranch in Montana, including six days on horseback, with roping and branding of calves.

Yes, we left our farm and paid to stay in a feed storage building converted with bunkbeds and do ranch work for a week. By day three on the horse, I was very uncomfortable, having never ridden before. The next morning I was moving kind of slow and wavering in my decision to get back on the horse and Donald said "You're coming aren't you mom?" I did and I survived the week.

Two years later, Jeff, had chosen: a week fishing in Lake of the Woods, Canada. Because those waters are vast and we didn't know our way, I hired a guide for the week. Jeff was thrilled to find, when we got there that the guide was also 14 years old. It was pretty rustic and there were a few cold rainy days when I wondered what I had gotten myself into this time. Especially since our farm in Hayward has fishing waters within three miles in any direction.

Both trips were adventures for sure. We had no idea what we were headed for when we left our homes for another place. Yet, I have experienced with each son a closeness through those trips that cannot begin to be measured.

It must have been like that for Peter, James and John as they shared this experience with Jesus. These three men didn't know what the day would hold for them. On the way up the mountain, the only thing that mattered was that Jesus had asked them to share a special time with him.

As Christians we are called to be in relationship with each other. When we take the time to include others in our lives, we may not take them to the top of a mountain every time, but it is about showing up in the name of Jesus Christ and letting others know that they matter – to you and to God. In this way, all are blessed by the event.

The Japanese have this thing about Mount Fuji. Thousands and thousands of people make the pilgrimage to the mountain, but it is in climbing the mountain that you discover the secret of the mountain.

Once we have gone we have to be ready to **experience**. I always have a camera with me where ever I go, especially on new adventures...But I have found that even if the picture turns out pretty spectacular, when I show them to others, my vacation pictures become only one or two dimensional. The pictures are great reminders of the event for me, but never as good as the real thing, and I might miss the real things if I am too occupied with the camera.

Do you remember the story of Mary and Martha? Jesus and the guys came over to the house and Martha gets upset because Mary isn't helping prepare the meal. Luke 10:38-42 *Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me" But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

On that occasion Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better part. On the mountain top God ends the message to the disciples with these words: "Listen to him." Sometimes the best thing we can do is to sit quiet and take it all in. I have a plaque in my office which was given to me by a retired clergy person, which reminds me of the verse from Psalm 46 "Be still, and know that I am God." This is told to us in several different ways in several places in the scriptures.

Rodney Hunter, professor at Chandler School of Theology in Atlanta writes this: "Then as now the true, divine nature of Christ is known only to those to whom it is revealed; it is not a matter of public record. The knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah, Christ the Son of God, is a matter of revelation and comes in God's own way and time – as a gift...Jesus' mission was not to make a big deal of himself or to elevate his followers to

positions of power, authority, and prestige through identification with him. It was rather to point through and beyond himself to God.”

This is a spectacular story, but what does it tell us about how God enters our experience and how we encounter God, in various flashy and unflashy ways. Through our ability to ‘go’ and to ‘experience’ we can be changed. We see and understand things differently. When we come back down the mountain, nothing is the same. If you have ever sat bedside vigil while someone you love is dying, there is a heart aching, sweetness to being present with them. Especially if you have been watching them get to that place slowly.

It is another kind of mountain top experience, just being present with them. In death the presence of God is sacred and so holy. We are changed by those encounters with the holy. Whether they happen in the glorious, hallelujah kind of lightning bolt moments, or whether they happen in the midst of deep tragedy. These holy, sacred encounters with Christ, stay with you. Eventually we have to come down from that mountain, too, but we are changed. There is a new normal in us. When it has been a mountain top experience, we sometimes wonder how everyone else can’t see that we are different than when we left.

You go away for a week, are changed and then all of the sudden you realize you have to go back to the world; you have to deal with the bills and the laundry and all that stuff. You don’t want to come off that mountain. How has the mountain changed you? Once you get down, how does it make you different? When you see all of the roads tangled down in the valley, do you know which way to go?

Two weeks ago, I shared that in differing cases there is a time *not* to tell and **a time to tell**. When we have changed there will be a time to tell, though it isn’t always right there or then in that place or time. For all of the Biblical stories, someone had to write their experiences down. Someone had to tell about their experience on their mountain. And it won’t always make sense to the person who hasn’t been there.

“I can’t explain it scientifically, but I gotta tell you what it’s done for me, how it’s changed my life.” It’s not always pretty and it’s not always neat and not everybody gets the lightning bolt, but once in a while you get that little nudge. Once in a while you get to say “I understand.” And then the next step is that we’ve got to tell someone. If you understand that it is worth talking about, you realize it is a mountaintop experience.

The disciples with Jesus had their time on the mountain and though they were told to remain silent, eventually they could share what happened to them, And the people of God have said ‘amen’ ever since.

The circle comes around again as it becomes time to be **ready to ‘go’ again**. Experiences building on each other; what is happening now may be preparing you for what is to come; for future use and purpose. If you look back at your experiences, you often can see that they build on each other. I began public speaking at age 9 in 4-H, and see what I can do now! I never have understood why it is so difficult for others to get up here and talk, but my experiences began when I was young and I claim it as one of my gifts from God. It is truly unimaginable for us to know how God might stretch us and use us in the future because of our experiences of the past.

When humanity encounters the Divine we are given a lot to take in. We then can stand up to every mystery, every moment, every event and even every tragedy. What are your mountaintop experiences? They may not all be good or easy experiences, but they are still your experiences.

United Methodist Pastor Charles Alkula gives us this: “When I was serving as a Navy Chaplain in Japan, I was introduced to the annual migration to Mount Fuji. Each summer, pilgrims climb Mount Fuji and each person takes a bamboo walking stick that is branded at each of the rest stations on the way to the summit.

At the summit, the reward is not simply a nice souvenir; it is a life that is changed by an encounter with an awesome display of God’s creative power. At each stage of today’s journey we are also branded by our encounters with the Holy in our lives.”