

## SERMON – 7 FEBRUARY 2016

Reading: Luke 9:28-36

The text verse for the sermon is verse 33 - And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said.”

What is our reading all about? Mountains have always been associated with the presence of God in the Old Testament especially when God appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb and to Elijah on Mount Carmel. Now God revealed Himself in Jesus on the Mount of Olives and for the first time the disciples who were very close to Jesus realised the true meaning of Jesus’ coming to the world, namely, to reveal the glory of God.

But it seems as if these disciples did not understand what was going on, especially when they saw Jesus’ appearance changing and Moses and Elijah speaking about His “departure”. It is clear that Peter did not want Jesus to go down the mountain, that he did not want the revelation to end. He says to Jesus that he will built three tabernacles – one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. The Greek word that is translated as “tents” is misleading. The plural Greek word “Skenas” refers to a dwelling with a roof on, and can be understood also as a temple.

While Peter was speaking, all of a sudden, a cloud overshadowed them and a voice said to them: “This is my beloved Son: hear him.” It is again almost the same words that were said during Jesus’ baptism. After this experience I do not think that these disciples were still in the dark about the true nature of Jesus’ mission. But I do think it is fair to say that they could not have thought that Jesus would actually sacrifice His life on the cross for all the believers.

Peter wanted the miracle moment to last longer by “incarcerating” Jesus into a “permanent dwelling”.

As a Jew he knew what happened to Moses after God spoke to him on Mount Horeb. Moses was sent to the Pharaoh to make sure the Egyptian king deliver the Jews. Once down in the valley Moses had to face an uncertain future. But God also appeared to Moses again on Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai and gave him the 10 commandments. And again Moses

had to go down in the valley to find that his people are worshipping a golden calf! Elijah also worshipped God on Mount Carmel but once he came down from the mountain top, he had to run for his life for Jezebel wanted him dead.

But God is bigger than any man-made structure. God is not confined to any human space or human time. God is everywhere!

I think we all understood Peter's reaction. We truly sympathize with him for wanting to hold on a wee bit longer to his mountain-top experience. I am sure you all know what I mean with such an experience. It happens when you "see" or "experience" the miracles of God in everyday living.

I, for one, often just shake my head in sheer wonder of how God works. Think of the moment when you held your first child, when you encountered the miracle of life. Think of your wedding day when God blessed you with a lifelong partner. Think of all the people that He brings together, sometimes even from different continents, different cultures and different backgrounds. Think of all those moments that you wondered about something and then all of a sudden you had a clear vision and understanding. Think of nature and how God created everything so beautifully unique and special. Think of that mountain-top experience that occurred as you just sat quietly in prayer with God, or maybe you remember an experience in your life when God brought you to the mountain top and you felt God was so close to you that you could just reach out and touch the hand of God.

Peter had to learn from experience that God is not only on the mountain tops. He is also in the valleys. Jesus had to go through the valley of shadow and death on the cross, to deliver all the believers from their sins. Jesus had to endure the valleys, in order to bring all the believers into God's kingdom.

We all know that once we have been on the mountain, we too have to go down into the valleys and experience the challenges of daily life. We cannot remain on the "mountain" like Peter did. But today we have heard the good news, we are not alone. God is not only on the proverbial "mountain tops". He is also in the valleys, in and through His Holy Spirit. In faith, He is with us, everywhere we go.

So, when you and I are battered by the winds of life, when we are engulfed by the dampness of sorrow, when we struggle and cry out to God in our valleys of temptation, hurt, bereavement, He is there. Our mountain top experiences often help us to face our “valley experiences”. So, when we are hurting and longing for God, let us think of all our “mountain top” experiences, knowing that He is still beside us to help and lead us in our valleys.

I mean, let us pause for a moment and think about what happened to Martin Luther King.

He preached on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee about his mountain top experience. His sermon was entitled, “I see the Promised Land.” Martin Luther King said that he didn’t worry about anything because he had been to the mountaintop with God. He said he had no fear, “For my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!” He had the living hope that he is never alone and without the help of God.

The next day, Martin Luther King was shot dead.

I think this must give you and me hope.

When we are in the valley of joblessness, or in the valley of loneliness, or in the valley of sickness, or in the valley of depression, or in the darkest of all valleys, the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil for the Lord is with us. We need to remember our mountaintop experiences and remember that just as God was with us up on the mountaintop, God is with us in the valleys of our life.

So beloved brother and sister, if you are on the mountain top with God, do not be afraid to come down from that mountain. God will help you through his Holy Spirit with whatever you have to face in your valley of uncertainty. Come down from the mountain, and take God’s hand. When Jesus came down, He made it possible for you and me to “see” the coming of the Lord, too.

Amen