

“You Can’t Stay on the Mountain Forever”

Luke 9:28-35

Series: Summer Getaways: Week 5 - The Transfiguration

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It’s a beautiful, clear morning. The sun is just peeking over the mountain, giving you a glimpse of how spectacular it will be when it fully rises. One of your best friends invited you and your two buds to come with him for a hike. It’s early, you’re a little tired, but you love this guy - so off you go! Winding your way up, you talk about your work, what’s next on the agenda, but you mostly just enjoy the view and being together. You reach the top and while the view is amazing, you’re a little winded, so you and your two friends decide to rest just a little bit while your friend, whose bright idea it was to get up so early, explores the mountaintop. Yawning, you lay down on the grassy summit.

Wait, what is happening? Blinding light. Your eyes - the mountain is ablaze -- your friend, his face is glowing with the brightest light you’ve ever seen and his clothes are a dazzling, brilliant white. You rub your eyes in disbelief. Suddenly two men appear and begin talking with him. There, standing in spectacular glory are Moses and Elijah glowing as brilliantly as your friend Jesus. How can this be -- Moses and Elijah? These are the superstars, the Hall of Fame leader and prophet, who have been dead for years. Clearly, this is no normal hike, no ordinary mountain top. Just who is your friend Jesus anyway? Impulsively, you jump up and say, “Master, it is good for us to be here! Let me put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Luke 9:33. This is incredible - you want to stay here up here on the mountain with these guys forever! Just then a huge cloud appears, covering all of you. You’re scared witless. You hear a loud voice from the cloud, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to him.” Luke 9:35. The voice of the almighty God! Stunned, you, James, and John fall face down to the ground, shaking, terrified.

Has this happened to anyone on a mountain hike recently? Can you even imagine? This was definitely no ordinary hike -- this was the ultimate mountaintop experience since referred to as the Transfiguration. When the absolute holiness of Jesus was revealed by God to three of Jesus’s closest disciples - Peter, James, and John.

When God spoke from the cloud saying, “Listen to him,” he was confirming Jesus’s power and revealing his long-held plan to save us. The Law (represented in Moses) and the Prophets (represented in Elijah) point us to God’s plan - redemption through Jesus. The disciples learned something new that day on the mountaintop - their friend Jesus was not just their teacher, their rabbi -- he was the holy son of God, the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Talk about a game changer...

Have you ever had a mountain top experience? I am pretty confident NONE of us ever experienced this kind of mountaintop. But how about a time when you truly felt the glory of God - where you experienced God’s presence in a different way, more intimate and real? Or where you felt God tapping you lightly on the shoulder or heard his voice speaking to you in his Word.

Maybe you experienced a feeling like that on a Mission Trip -- serving in the DR, Bahamas, Haiti, South Carolina, MD, Philly. Or maybe outside in nature -- feeling the majesty and power of God on a literal mountain or roaring in the waves at the beach -- rolling in and out, washing the

sand and our souls clean every time. How about at a retreat or a concert -- Alpha, 30 Hour Famine, Women's Retreat, Lake Champion, Toby Mac, Chris Tomlin. How about right here in Worship - when it feels like God is speaking directly to you in the Message or you get goosebumps singing lyrics like "Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place." Awe-inspiring moments that you wish you could capture forever, just like Peter wanted to do by offering his tent making skills to build shelters so he, James, and John could stay with Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop.

Back when I was a kid, each summer I would spend one week at church camp. My friend Cindy came with me and it was an amazing week, full of arts and crafts, swimming, boating (we would absolutely count either of those activities as our "shower" for the day). Because it was after all "Christian Camp," we had Worship and Devotion time -- my first experience in a small group. Each year we ended the week on a literal mountain. We sang along with our guitar-playing counselors and shared stories of what we learned the week, how God changed us. With earnest hearts, we threw sticks in a big roaring campfire symbolizing letting go of our past, getting rid of our sins. We hugged our new friends and amazing camp counselors. Just like Peter, no one wanted to leave that mountain. "Can't we stay here forever?" we pleaded. But soon we headed down the mountain to catch a few hours of sleep until our parents picked us up the next morning for our reluctant return home, full of great memories and excited for new beginnings.

Maybe you're sitting here thinking huh? "Mountain top experiences? Nope; not me. I never went to camp or mission trips, retreats are not my thing and God certainly doesn't speak to me like that. I'm not even sure I am a Christian. I'm certainly not "that " kind of Christian. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus reminds us how well God knows his children, "Indeed the very hairs on your head are all numbered." Luke 12:7. God knows us intimately - how our brains work and how our individual personalities respond. So when one of us might be on our knees in tears over an experience with God, others of us might simply come to the realization we've learned something new about God. There is no "right way" to experience God; God meets us where we are.

Just as Jesus reminds Peter and the disciples and our camp counselors reminded Cindy and me, we can't stay on the mountain forever. Eventually, the mission trip ends, the conference concludes, we sing the last hymn in Worship. We have to go back to the valley, our "real world," with distractions and demands, temptations and trials. How do we come down the mountain, back to our normal life, while holding onto all we experienced, what we learned, what God revealed to us?

Coming back from my camp Cindy and I were always full of fire. I can clearly picture us in her living room, Way Bible in hand, paper to take notes - ready to conquer the Word (and the World!). We'd start great. And then one of us would go on vacation and we'd miss a week. And school would start and a couple more weeks would be missed... Boyfriends and band... Soon our new habit became a distant memory. We'd go back the next summer, gaining a bit more understanding of God and what it means to follow God. And we'd start the whole thing over again, resolving to try harder this time. And school and jobs and life would intervene again, and time with God and even together became less and less. Eventually Cindy and I lost touch.

What were we missing? We thought we could map out a reading plan and we'd be good. We tried to do it on our own power, our own strength. Friends, we didn't have to -- **we don't go back to the world alone** -- God gave us an amazing gift -- himself in the form of Jesus. Emmanuel literally means "God with us." As the disciples lay quaking on the ground on that beautiful mountain, Jesus gently touched them saying, "Get up. Don't be afraid." He didn't send the

disciples on their way alone, He went with them down the mountain and back into the world, just as God is always with us in our daily lives.

Living in that power, we can move forward by prioritizing spending time with the one who speaks to us - Prioritize God. As Cindy and I discovered, you can't have a lasting relationship with someone you don't spend time with. You might be groaning -- TIME - that's my big problem in life! I don't have any TIME! Maybe don't set yourself up for failure by deciding to conquer the ENTIRE bible in one summer - start with realistic steps.

A few years back, Pastor Doug challenged us to take something on, rather than give something up for Lent - to spend 10 - 15 minutes daily with God. "When?" I thought! I reluctantly set my alarm for 15 minutes earlier, before anyone in my house was up. It was hard at first. But I developed a routine, making coffee, snuggling in a favorite chair - with my dog of course - and soon I began to look forward to that time alone with God. Now I rarely miss taking the time and if I do, my whole day feels off, untethered. That quiet time with God fills my heart with joy as I journal all the things I'm grateful to God for. I ask God to be with me that day-- to set my feet on His path; to prioritize my day. And I feel grounded, strengthened, and ready for the day ahead. As I slowly made this time a daily habit, I started hearing and seeing God in my every day -- not just on mountaintops.

We all need to take time to **Process** what we experienced, what we learned --- whether on the mountaintop or what we hear from God daily. This looks different for everyone of course. How do you process something? Maybe journaling, pouring out or scribbling down your thoughts and experiences helps you process thoughts. Or sharing with others -- When we put words to what we experience, our excitement is contagious and the experience becomes more vivid and alive. Maybe you need to sit quietly, contemplating it all in the stillness of prayer and reflection. Whatever that looks like to you, make time to think about and understand what God is saying to you.

Finally we need to act on what we hear God saying. God often puts people on my heart during my quiet time. When I follow through on those promptings and reach out, I'm amazed at how often someone will say -- "How did you know I needed to talk?" or "I really needed that hug today." Please don't misunderstand - Friends this has nothing to do with me -- - all God. We just need to follow through on what He says.

Is God nudging you in a new direction or revealing a new passion or spiritual gift. -- Time to put it to work! Loved building the new school in the DR? Craig Bryson heads our Habitat for Humanity outreach and is always looking for willing workers to join the team. Realize that singing praise, music gives you great joy? Join the choir or audition for the band! Do you have the gift of service? Look around you -- there are opportunities to serve others everywhere - here at Woodside, in our communities, around the world, right in your family. Check out ideas under the Serve tab on the Woodside website. Spend time with God and He will show you.

I always had faith growing up, but it wasn't until I came to Woodside when that slow steady flame began to catch fire. I took the scary step of joining a growth group (and yes -- it was life-changing). As I started incorporating my faith more and more into my daily life, it became easier and easier to share with others naturally. I often listened to Christian music when I ran, and a neighbor asked "What are you listening to -- because it sure makes you happy!" Shout out to K-Love radio! A friend asked if she could join that "other book club of yours-- you know the one about God." New growth group member!

I tentatively began sharing devotions that really touched my heart, on places like Facebook. I found that the very words God used to bring me comfort and joy, did the same for others. Last summer I got a Facebook message from my old camp friend Cindy -- she was in the hospital with serious complications from Covid and was really, really scared. She followed my posts on Facebook through the years and asked me to pray for her. God gave me the reassuring words she needed to hear and the two girls who saw God's glory on the mountaintop at Pocono Plateau once again shared and experienced the peace that only God can give. Again, it wasn't me -- God chose to use me as his vessel simply because I made myself available. If God can redeem Facebook, anything's possible, right?

Friends, Our God really is an amazing God. He just doesn't give us a one-time Mountain Top experience -- snooze and you lose! God continues to reveal himself, teach us, draw us close to him in many different ways. Some may be amazing and exhilarating -- true mountain top experiences, others may be quiet and personal when God gently taps us on the shoulder, reminding us He is with us. Others may come late at night when we release our worries to God and we feel His perfect peace as we drift off to sleep.

The question is, will you invest the time to hear from the One who loves you best and follow His direction in the valley of everyday life?