Don’t Miss It

Encounters with Jesus in Epiphany

Matthew 17:1-8

Transfiguration Sunday

February 23, 2020

Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

**Matthew 17:1-8** **(NRSV) The Transfiguration**

**17**Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. **2**And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. **3**Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4**Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A1-8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23705a)] will make three dwellings[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A1-8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23705b)] here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” **5**While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved;[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A1-8&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23706c)] with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” **6**When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. **7**But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” **8**And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

I can confidently say that no matter where we’ve been appointed to churches - east to Ellicott and Simla; west to the Grand Valley; and now the west end of COS, Pastor Gene and I have never missed A SUNDAY WORSHIP.

God knows what we need to be doing!

Now, that doesn’t mean that there haven’t been a few *week* *days* of exciting travel, but God knows what we need.

Heading home from here our cell coverage “runs out of phone cord” – usually as we hit the peak of Ute Pass in Divide and we have to say “talk to ya later.”

Again, God knows what we need to be doing!

We’ve come through the curves of the Manitou canyon. We’ve negotiated with traffic getting into the correct lane so they can get to Cripple Creek. We’re cresting the Pass…

…and we are blessed!

When we say that quick “goodbye” it’s time to look up. So we don’t miss it.

We have to do the traveling, yes, (sometimes muttering “what are you thinking” to other drivers) but LOOK UP!

Out on the western horizon are the majestic 14ers!

Even with poor road conditions I’m partial to this time of year, to look out and see the beauty of those mountains. They are some of Gods masterpieces.

They’re stunning. Especially with the Colorado-blue sky.

But I have to look up!

Let the phone signal peter out.

Praise the Lord I’ve gotten through the curves and lane changes and RECOGNIZE – I’m HERE. DON’T MISS IT!

Peter, James, and John, Jesus’ inner circle of disciples, were chosen BY Jesus to make the incredible journey up the mountain to experience something that would change their lives.

Do you ever wonder, as you hear or read these verses, “Where were the other disciples?”

One article I read said, “they were at the bottom of the mountain ‘playing’ church.”

Too often church goers **are like** those nine other guys…players...content to go to church occasionally…fumble around to drop a couple of bucks in the offering plate…try to stay awake for the sermon.

But, I think the mountain climbers with Jesus wanted to be closer to Jesus.

They have a sincere desire to know Jesus better, live in his example and WALK THE WALK with him.

That’s probably why Jesus chose them.

What about us?

Do we have that same kind of desire…to be closer to Jesus; to know God better?

Do we want to experience *mountain tops* (and the valleys) that come with the walk with Jesus? Do we?

Well, then, let’s take a look at today’s reading.

There are some things that will help us know Jesus better and walk with him!

First, the journey is difficult.

“Jesus,” Scripture says, “took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain away from everyone else.”

High mountain! ☺

For us, sitting at the base of Pikes Peak, Mount Tabor, traditionally thought to be *the* mountain that Jesus and his disciples were on, is only 1886 feet high. The highest point in Israel, Mount Herman, is just a little lower than Ute Pass in Divide.

So, for those of us who’ve climbed a few hills around here – maybe even a 14er – we might scoff at a mere 1886 feet. But, around Jerusalem THAT WAS high.

Rick, and his friends in the Colorado Mountain Club, is a great resource for information about preparing to trek a mountain. Wish I’d known Rick when I tried to tackle Quandary Peak (a 14er) with Gene a decade or so ago. I made it to about 12,500 feet before the black “tunnel vision” of altitude issues set in. I’m good DRIVING over the Continental Divide – over 11k and 12k foot passes, but….huffing and puffing – I can do that right here in COS at 6100 feet! Those folks who make a sport out of completing Colorado’s 14ers…I’ll have to read about ‘em!

The point is, sometimes the path up a mountain is treacherous, but the top can be reached if a climber is prepared.

THOSE WHO DO prepare have a lot of experiences.

God’s Creation is bountiful for views, terrain that is different above tree line, and critters. Some of the experiences are life changing! How wonderful to be able to share those things. God bless those who can!

So, here’s the analogy.

Even we, “lower-altitude” hikers, who want “mountain top” ***spiritual live*s,** with life-changing experiences, well, we have to be prepared, too.

We have to have a fervent prayer life.

We should open our Bibles more often than not.

We get close to God by spending quality time with God!

We should share in worship experiences and devotional time. And we should talk to others about THOSE THINGS and about Jesus…

…and share our gifts, time, talents, and tithes with the ministries of our church.

And, when we know the trek is going to be difficult, I have to admit: I don’t think “Oh, I’ll just grab “anybody” and ask ‘em to come on this journey with me.”

No.

I’d probably do more like Jesus: choose someone (maybe 2 or three someones, like Jesus did) who I know I’d want to spend time with.

Not everyone was chosen to go with Jesus the day of his Transfiguration.

//

Another thing we learn from today’s passage is that climbing a mountain (literally or the figurative mountains of life) where we’ve never been before, like making ANY journey, will need a guide.

Did you notice that the verse said, “Jesus took” the disciples?

It doesn’t say that he was anything but the leader.

He wasn’t a follower, a companion or friend, he was the leader and the guide.

I get a hoot out of bumper stickers.

I don’t want them on my car, but I’ll read ‘em.

Once we get through the political ones, the one that rubs me the wrong way is “Jesus is my copilot”.

You know that one?

It would be better if it said “Jesus is my PILOT.

Not the Copilot.

We need Jesus to lead us. To guide us. And WE JUST NEED TO FOLLOW!

Our mistake, (yes?) is when we say “OK Jesus I can handle it now”

Wrong!

The journey of life…

…and the mountain climbing with Jesus is hard work!

Jesus lead us!

Another thing: To get to the top we can’t get tired!

We’ve got to eat right for stamina!

And just like an athlete gets strength from eating the right foods, WE have to get our ***spiritual***strength from what we put in our minds and hearts.

If we fill up with what culture and society feeds us…we’re going to be spiritually weak.

We won’t be able to make the climb and regretfully, we’ll miss the view and the experience AND the rewards for getting to where we’re going with Jesus.

We wanna make the trip. So God has given us God’s words to read and study…fill up with AND to chart our course with the best navigational tool we can use!

Life can be difficult – amen?

But, when we look to Jesus Christ for guidance…

…when we LISTEN in prayer MORE than speak….

…when we build our stamina for the walk of life with Jesus by studying the Bible, we’ll NOT ONLY have life but “abundant life” Jesus said. (John 10:10)

That word “abundant” means “spilling over”.

Think of it this way. It’s like putting a cup on a saucer – check the back of the cupboard – and start to fill the cup.

When the cup gets full, keep pouring….

…it’ll spill over….and fill the saucer…and THEN KEEP POURING!

That’s what God wants for us! Abundant to OVERFLOWING!

//

And finally, for today…remember that the results of making the journey with Jesus are out of this world!

That’s good, isn’t it?

Stepping out with Jesus.

Being prepared…being, like Peter, James and John, in the right *position*…

…and having the sincere desire to be close to Jesus…

…WE WILL GET TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN!

What happened that day on THAT mountain?

Scripture tells us that it was a LIFE CHANGING experience!

Jesus’ clothes became whiter than Tide® white!

His divine glory shined through – right through the “robes of human flesh” that he’d put on when he left Heaven to live among US.

And God spoke, just like the day of Jesus’ baptism, “*This is my Son, the Beloved.*

*With him I am well pleased.”*

Since his baptism, Jesus has done some good stuff, right?

Healing and teaching, feeding 5000, and eating with marginalized people.

Yes, God looked on Jesus and was pleased.

But, God had also looked at all the sins of the world and realized that a sacrifice had to be made to save humanity.

And it wasn’t going to be just “any” sacrifice.

It had to be one that was ENOUGH to end ALL sacrifices.

So, (and these are the events we’ll re-visit beginning next Sunday as we journey with Jesus in Lent) God in the person of Jesus, the Son, took on human form and was placed in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit.

He was born and lived a perfect life.

Then the world rejected God-the-Son and crucified Him, slaughtered Him like an innocent lamb with all the sins of the world upon Him - everybody’s sins.

He was taken off the cross and laid in a borrowed tomb (praise God he didn’t use it very long) and after three days the women went to the tomb and IT WAS EMPTY.

He IS RISEN INDEED!

After another 40 day period of time, The Son ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God AND I think Jesus is sitting there, UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN, and he’s talking to God about US.

//

Because they put themselves in the proper place and followed Jesus, Peter, James, and John witnessed something few people have ever experienced – at least until we get to Heaven.

They saw the true glory of Jesus!

And they heard the voice of God say, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”*

There are life-changing experiences waiting for us when we put ourselves in the proper position to walk with Jesus, to know God better!

An abundant, overflowing, wonderful life waits for us.

Let’s go to the mountain top with Jesus.

WE DON’T WANT TO MISS IT!

Amen!