

Matthew 17:1-9

Transfiguration; February 26 & 27, 2017

Over the last couple of years, they had seen Jesus do amazing things. They saw him heal the sick, cure leprosy and calm the strongest of storms. They saw him feed thousands from next to nothing and walk on water. They saw a man who was not afraid to confront the sin of anyone. He wouldn't hesitate to take on the famous and powerful. He could preach a sermon better than anyone had ever heard. He could take the most complex truth of the Bible and make it sound so simple. He could paint pictures with words like no one else.

Yes, there had been times it seemed like they were on a rollercoaster of a ride with Jesus. There had been bumps along the way. Yet, there was nothing that seemed to stop him. But things were about to come to a screeching halt. Why did Jesus have to ruin it?, Peter thought. Peter had just boldly confessed that Jesus was the **"Messiah, the Son of the living God."**

Everything was about to change. Matthew, in the chapter before our text, tells us: **"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."** It was not supposed to end this way! A dead Jesus! No way! Peter was not one to hide his emotion. So, he said to Jesus: **"Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"** Peter misunderstood Messiah's ultimate mission. Jesus' mission was the cross! It was death! He says to Peter: **"Get behind me Satan!"** Yes! This was the only way the world could be saved.

Jesus knew that his disciples were now in one of those "deep valley" days. They needed a "mountain-top day." They needed to have one of those days that they would remember the rest of their life. You know what "Mountain-top" days feel like, don't you? The day that you got married; the day that you looked each other in the eye and said: *"I do."* The day that you graduated from college, and you had your dream job. The day that you held your first child in your arms. Mountain-top days. The Good Days of life. The days that you will celebrate and remember the rest of your life.

You and I know that life is not always filled with those "mountain-top" days. It is impossible because of sin. Between those "mountain-top" days are those "deep valley" days. The days that you would like to forget. The days when the doctor tells you that you have cancer. The day that the phone call comes in the middle of the night. The days that hurt and are filled with pain. The days that you don't know what is around the corner.

That's how the disciples felt today as Jesus took them up to the mountain-top. They needed a "mountain-top" day! They didn't understand what all laid ahead of them. But Jesus did. So, Jesus gave them one. He took Peter, James and John up a high mountain. **"There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."** Talk about a "mountain-top" day! This was an easy day to be a disciple of Jesus. Standing right in front of them was Moses – the man who wrote the first books of the Bible. The man who led the children of Israel out of Egypt. The man who parted the Red Sea. The man who saw God face-to-face. Next to him was the great prophet Elijah. The prophet who was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. The prophet who never had to face death. If we were there, we would join Peter in saying: **"Lord, it is good for us to be here."** I can't imagine what they saw on that mountain top.

Jesus wanted his disciples to see who he really was. He didn't want them to have any doubts at all who he was. He wanted them to know that whenever they might have one of those "deep valley" days, they could have a "mountain-top" day with Him. He was getting them ready for some deep valley days that were coming. Today, we get ready for those deep valley days of Lent. We will begin on this Wednesday to follow Jesus to another mountain where things are going to get real ugly. The season of Lent is that season in the church year that for 40 days we focus our thoughts on Jesus and the cross. Even today, at the end of our service we begin that journey by saying farewell to alleluias in this season of Lent. For a moment on that mountain, the disciples saw here on earth, Jesus, as he is in heaven.

What is even more amazing is that he gave up for a while, all that power and glory to become one of us. Why would he do that? That really is the central question of the Bible. It is the reason why we can say today: **"Lord, it is good for us to be here."** When we look at that statement of Peter, it changes everything, doesn't it. Have you ever asked yourself the

question: *“Why do we exist as a church? Why are you here today? Why do we do all this ministry together as a congregation? Why give your money to support this ministry? Why give your time?”* The answer is simple: **“It is good for us to be here.”** Because it is here again and again we hear that Jesus gave up all that glory for a while to save us. We have a Savior who loves us.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that Jesus, Moses and Elijah **“spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”** There is no doubt. There is no pep talk to Jesus. *Come on, you can do it Jesus.* They knew Jesus was going to be successful. He was going to accomplish his mission. Just in case they had any doubts, God the Father said: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** Peter wanted to stay on that mountain top. Who wouldn’t? Why would you want to come down?

But Jesus said to them: **“Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”** Jesus says to us as a congregation: **“Get up! Don’t be afraid.”** He says to us on those days that are deep valley days in our lives: **“Get up! Don’t be afraid.”** One day, you and I will have the ultimate “mountain-top” day that will never end. May we join Peter in saying: **“It is good for us to be here!”** Amen.