

The More of God
Luke 9:28-36
Sermon by Mag Richer Smith
February 11, 2018

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

In 1975, I climbed a mountain.

In actuality it was probably just a big hill, and it was behind our short-term voluntary service unit in San Clemente, California. (We were there to help in the resettlement of the boat people who had escaped from Viet Nam.) That morning I'd read an article encouraging women to train for work in the Church. Well, I was working with immigrants on behalf of the church. I had taught in a Church related School, but there were some stiff boundaries around how women' gifts could be used. (I had never met a woman pastor).

But that day on the mountaintop, looking out onto the vast Pacific Ocean, it seemed like God's possibilities were as endless as those waves. There I was *pouring out my questions* and asking God for direction, when I heard: "Go. Go receive training. Go for me." So I *descended the mountain, returned to our apartment and wrote* to our seminary for an application, having no idea where it might lead.

Mountains, both literally and figuratively, have played important roles in my journey and in Jesus' journey too.

Here he is today, having turned his face toward JERUSALEM,
Knowing it will likely mean the worst...
Shaming, torture, execution.

How will JESUS maintain a centered trust?
And how can his followers possibly remain steady,
when calamity hits their movement
and disaster comes to their HOUSE?

How can Jesus prepare his loved ones for the
Suffering out there awaiting them?
He has been talking to his followers
about the cross/ losing/ & how hard it's going to get...

But this conversation has been way too SCAREY to take in...*(Those closest to Jesus are still waiting for his inauguration and for their justice movement to win!)*

But Jesus knows that he's not going to get through the coming days
without *taking time to:*

LISTEN to the VOICE OF LOVE...

quiet his inner chatter, release his fears,
& *LET the Spirit strengthen and encourage him.*

But Jesus doesn't go off to pray alone... Not now.
Facing into crisis, Jesus needs his small group,
his trusted friends, to walk the *rugged terrain* on this uphill journey
with him ...
so he *invites* Peter, James and John to come along.

And here they are on the summit of Mount Tabor.
If we'd go to Mt Tabor today we would find a mountain too steep for
tourist busses to ascend.
Only true pilgrims venture the climb to the top, where

on a clear day, there is a wonderful vista and one can view the sun rise over the Sea of Galilee and watch the sun set over the Mediterranean.

This Mountaintop is even today a prayerful place, where one can *inhale* the SPIRIT of peace and be reassured that God's possibilities are endless.

On reaching the summit, Jesus invites his disciples to pray with him. But this is Peter, James and John (the guys who would rather sleep than pray when they are afraid) and the steep trek has *winded* them.

It's foggy, and & wondering *why* they are here.

But after their nap, when the Sun emerges from the clouds and they see the amazing view, they know they've never been this close to the Source of LIGHT...Here it is... *shining* on Jesus as he prays, and they KNOW that God IS meeting them here.

So as evening approaches, they set up camp, build a fire and tell stories of others who've been to the MT.

There's Moses on Mount Horeb...

& that call from the burning bush..that sounds like:

*"Stand up, Moses, Stand up for righteousness,
Stand up for justice, and lo...I will be with you Always!"*

They remember both Moses' reluctance and God's persistence, and how in the end Moses *trusts the Spirit* to make him BOLD in confronting Pharaoh.

And they remember MT. Sinai where Moses attends to the Voice of Love that brings clarity to what loving God and neighbor and self looks like. (THAT's what the LAW is supposed to be...simply a WAY to love!)

And they remember MT. Nebo where Moses, at the end of life, *looks* over to the Promised Land and knows that he may not get there with them, but it's not about HIS arrival there anymore. It's about the kind

of world, the kind of foundation, the kind of shalom, environment and reasons to hope that we are leaving on this earth for future generations.

There they are on the mountain around that campfire with Moses in their midst.

And ELIJAH, too...

They tell stories of HIS confronting the King who's doing "More wrong in the sight of the Lord than all his predecessors."

What can one do when a leader who is doing so much harm and is in power?

And How does Elijah become BOLD in addressing the injustice?

How does he receive clarity, when his own life is in jeopardy?

Well, Elijah goes to the Mountain...

to Mt. Horeb where he WAITS for God to show up...

A God (*who does not come in the earthquake, wind or fire*), but in a *still, small voice*.

LOUD, COURAGEOUS Elijah gets his sustenance from the God who whispers,

"I will come to you in the silence!"

On the MOUNTAIN, Jesus and his small group *find* God in the silence and in the stories & *discover again* that the LOVER OF OUR SOULS is as close as breath.

Moses and Elijah are HERE ENCOURAGING

Jesus and his followers REMEMBER they are NOT ALONE.

No, not alone in *confronting* the powers

Not alone in *protesting the government's plan* to build a detention center in Elkhart County...

Not alone in *breaking down* walls of hostility

Not alone in *facing* into suffering...

They are accompanied, not only by God's Spirit,

but also by a whole host of saints who have gone before us & are right HERE saying:

*We are with you
There is a way through
A way to believe,
a way to walk
A way to hope*

YOU are *standing on the foundation* of the Law & the Prophets, Don't give up!

Several years ago on a sabbatical, Bob and I were *communing* with Felix Manz, George Blauroch and Conrad Grebel in the Grossmünster Church in Zurich where these young Anabaptist radicals once worshiped. We were there with their stories of *taking Jesus seriously enough to risk everything to follow...*

*refusing to take the sword,
choosing to make adult decisions of faith and baptism that marked a clear separation between Church & State.*

We remembered how Blauroch disrupted worship that he deemed unfaithful to Jesus' Way, and how Felix Manz, a promising young scholar, was drowned at age 26 in the river outside this Church, refusing to recant the faith that enlivened him.

We were living with these stories from our Anabaptist predecessors, when all of a sudden the floor beneath us literally began to shake!

The floor was *vibrating* with a sound from a strange & unfamiliar instrument. *We followed the sound* to the cave-like stone crypt beneath the sanctuary, and there, four men were standing, each against a different wall, *humming* loudly into the center of the cave in harmony. The strange instrument turned out to be the human voices underneath us. *(There are a whole host of saints whose songs of faith are vibrating the floor where we are sitting right now!)*

Jesus and his small group need the songs and stories...

And I, too, wonder where I would be without Mary's "*Let it be*" or Martin's *crossing the bridge of fear* or Fanni Lou's *little shining light!*

I wonder what my experience of God's grace would be without a *Jonah who ran away* and a *Sarah who laughed* and a *Peter who denied* .

I wonder how I would keep on keeping on without a *Paul who was imprisoned*, or without Jesus' begging for this cup to pass.. but still getting to that... "*Nevertheless*".. or without a Grandpa who stared down the crowd at his door who were there to tar and feather him for being a *yellow-bellied pacifist in WW 1*.

I need these stories. I need them to face difficulties and pain. I need them to keep me holding on.

Jesus needed them too. SO here he is on retreat with *Moses and Elijah* who appear in the fog of his journey, *offering light, helping Jesus* see that he is the HEIR of the Law and the Prophets, reassuring him of his identity as God's Beloved and preparing him and his friends for what lies ahead.

They reassure Jesus that he IS on solid ground, & that the hum underneath him is the song for the way ahead.

A few years ago when Bob and I were *contemplating retiring*, wondering what it might be like to relinquish role and routine and worst of all~ our beloved community in Iowa City, we *took a retreat* and spent time in prayer and silence, *lifting up* our fears and *listening for* the VOICE of LOVE.

And the WORD I received on that retreat has sustained me through the past 2 ½ years of leaving Iowa, 16 temporary moves,

and 2 major transitions to new communities,
And that sustaining word was THIS:

"With each new door, there will be MORE of me."

I have needed to TRUST that I cannot go where God is NOT...and that GOD is always out ahead ...offering more love, more grace, more presence...even if the path is full of potholes and pain.

We need the mountaintops...

time set aside to intentionally SEEK GOD

and see the LIGHT of God's Way.

We need the accompaniment of those who will walk the rugged terrain with us.

And we need stories of Faith that keep us keeping on.

Peter finds ALL of this on the Mountain,

and is so gripped by this GOD-ENCOUNTER that he votes for *putting up some tents* around this experience and *camping right here* for the rest of their days.

"Let's just push pause and stay with THIS GOODNESS, this blessed communion, inspiration & wonder!"

I remember clearly when our kids were small,

and it was one of those 70 degree, sunshiny days that come after a long winter, and as we walked along the canal holding hands with our little ones, with the ducks swimming alongside us... under the blossoming trees, the 4 year old child beside me exclaimed...

"Oh MOM...you should preach about THIS day!"

How wonderful it would have been to stop right there

in that *moment of pure delight* and let that be the whole story of raising children!

I remember another time of hiking with our 3 teenagers, when a sudden rain came up in a torrent.

Luckily, there was a rocky overhang where we huddled together to keep dry and wait out the storm,
and our children spontaneously began singing...

"In the rifted Rock I'm resting."

I wanted to stop right there and let *that* be the whole story of life with teenagers, just huddled together *harmonizing, lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Peter is *dazzled* by the light of this holy moment and wants to *grasp it:*

Why return to the world that is messed up, to the nation that is sick, to the land that is troubled and to the confusion all around?

Peter does not want to *entertain* talk about suffering and dying, losing and crosses anymore.

He just wants to set up camp where life is safe and comfortable and God is near.

But...

No sooner does Peter voice his suggestion, than a cloud moves in *whisking the light away.* There will be no permanent dwellings of bliss on this earth. And Peter and James and John (and all of us) will return to the valley where the call is to love the neighbor and love the enemy and enter the struggle, because that is where God's transforming power is at work.

Life is about dying and rising, (even though I, like Peter, prefer mountain vistas and would vote for perpetual spring, but that is NOT what we get here.)

Still, we need those MOUNTAIN moments when our teenagers spontaneously sing praises,
and when the *sun reveals Jesus,*
and his Light points us Godward.

We need spiritual practices that strengthen our faith and help us LISTEN to Voice of LOVE and remind us how close God is.

We need both the stories and the community that ENCOURAGE US to enter the pain around the corner with TRUST...

(not trust that we will be *protected* or *rescued* from loss or illness or suffering or the cross),

but with assurance that with each new door there WILL BE MORE of
GOD and we cannot go where God is NOT.
The ONE who walks through the valleys with us is here.
And his name is Jesus, God's Chosen.
Listen to him!