

Luke 9:28-43a

Now about eight days after these saying Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now 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. Just 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. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When 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.

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seized him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all was astounded at the greatness of God.

Sermon

I would have loved to have been there. Standing amongst the more than 250,000 Americans, among the great historical landmarks of our National Capital - I would have loved to be there. I would have loved to hear the words straight from Martin Luther Kings mouth, "I have a dream".

I would have loved to have been there. Glued to the television and hearing the voice of Neil Armstrong as he step onto the surface of the moon, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind".

If you could choose to go back in time, to be at any one moment in history, to experience any one event, to be there when the world changed - where and when would you go? What moment would you pick? How do you think that moment would feel? Would it really change your life, or just be a moment you would never forget?

Peter and James and John didn't know why Jesus called them away from everyone else or why they were climbing to the top of the mountain. They didn't know that they were about to experience one of the most important events of their lives. They just happened to be caught up in following Jesus and so they arrived at the top of the hill.

Revelation, Transfiguration, dazzling white and changing appearance. Moses, the pillar of the law, and Elijah, the pillar of the prophets, appearing along side Jesus. And a cloud, like a fog falling down all around them, engulfed James and John and Peter. And that voice, coming from everywhere and no where at once, saying "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

It was a life changing moment, and I would have loved to have been there, and if I had been there, I would have liked to have stayed. "It is good for us to be here!"

I think most of us can think about those places, those moments where we felt most inspired, most uplifted, most relaxed, most whole. And when we think about those times we probably can remember also the moment we began to realize that we could not stay there, that we had to return home, to work, to house and bills and "normal" life. Remember how just the thought of it took your relaxed muscles and they began to tighten, how your energy levels began to plummet, how your creativity and hopeful dreams began to recenter on anxiety and worry. Can't we stay another week, can't we just live here, among the clouds?

But Jesus came down from the mountain, and Peter and James and John came with him. They descended into the valley below, leaving behind what was probably the most holy encounter with the sacred that had been experienced Moses encounter with the burning bush and Elijah's encounter with God in wind, flame, and sheer silence. They left that heavenly place and immediately the next day encountered the demon in the valley.

And just like that, the moment is gone, the holy is pushed to the past and the perverse takes center stage. But Jesus choose not to stay on the mountain, because he had work to do in the valley.

And we too are called down from our mountains, called to take our heads out of the clouds, called to descend into the valley and encounter the demons of this world, those that are in others and those that we harbor ourselves.

Imagine the hopelessness and desperation of the mother whose child was out of control. Imagine her frustration when Jesus was nowhere to be found and the disciples seemed to have no ability to cast the unclean spirit out. But Jesus came down and he cast out the demon.

I imagine that you are much like me, often feeling more like the disciples who either want to hide in the clouds, or feel live the evils of this world are more than we can cast out. I imagine you feel like I do most of the time, like the call to ministry in the valley is more than we can handle and we wish maybe God would call us somewhere else.

But we are called to the valley, to encounter the evils of racism and prejudice, to struggle with the inequalities between the genders, the demons of addiction, and the unclean spirits of greed and lust and violence. In the valley we must encounter the suffering of the refugee and the struggle of the homeless. There are demons that are real and powerful and they convulse our society, maul our neighbors, and throw our families to the ground. But Jesus came down from the mountain, descended into the valley of the shadow of death, and healed the boy.

There are still going to be mountaintops ahead of us, thin places and moments where heaven and earth are so near that they almost touch. But our calling, our purpose, our ministry is in the valley. May God give us the courage and strength to face evil and in Jesus name, to overcome it together. Thanks be to God for this sacred calling. Amen