
MOUNTAINTOPS, MINISTRIES, AND MIRACLES

This gospel story is a special one for me.

- I love stories about mountaintop experiences.
- I understand what it might have been like for the disciples, because I, too, have been to the mountaintop.
- I understand why they kept it a secret.
 - I mean, Moses and Elijah>>>who were they going to tell that they had seen Moses and Elijah?
 - Telling people that you had seen someone who has been dead for hundreds of years is not something sane people do, right?

When I was twelve-years-old, it was found that I had a tumor on the base of my brain.

- This tumor would require surgery and a biopsy to see how to treat it.
- The day of that surgery, I was taken by an orderly into a small room where he shaved all the hair off of my head.
- He then told me he would be back to take me into the operating room and that I should just lay there.
 - So, I closed my eyes and waited.
 - Sometime later—it seemed like a few minutes—I felt a hand firmly on my forearm.
 - Opening my eyes, I expected to see the orderly>>>but there was no one there.
 - In that moment, I knew immediately that it was JESUS,
 - and I knew that HE was going to be with me through that surgery.
 - I also came to understand that experience as His call to me to become a pastor.

I used to keep that story to myself.

- I mean, JESUS—who's going to believe that.
 - That's not the kind of thing a sane person talks about.
 - I might as well have said that I had seen Moses and Elijah!
- I also used to keep the story a secret because I didn't want to dissuade anyone who might be thinking about ordained ministry from pursuing that because they hadn't had a similar experience.

My friend, former bishop, Jon Enslin helped me with that though.

- Jon is a gifted pianist.
- He told me how on one occasion he was playing a concert in a school auditorium where he was up on stage and could see out a window to a church across the street.
 - As he played, Jon heard a voice coming from the church that said, "Jon, I want you here."
 - That's how Jon heard the call to become a pastor.
- After telling me his story, Jon looked at me and said, "Isn't it wonderful that GOD can get the attention of some people without having to hit them over the head with a 2x4."

Jon also helped me to understand some things about mountaintops, ministries, and miracles.

First, about mountaintops. Mountaintop experiences are rare.

A number of years ago, I was on a spirituality retreat, hoping to grow in my faith and commitment to GOD.

- Each person had a spiritual guide to help us in whatever journey we hoped to follow.
- I told my guide about that hospital experience, and said that I was desiring to have something like that happen again.
 - She looked at me for a moment and then said, "Do you know how many people would love to have that kind of experience even once?>>>And you want a second one?"

Mountaintops are rare but can be experienced.

- And they don't have to be quiet as dramatic as what I experienced in the hospital. They can happen in worship, during a meaningful conversation, on a retreat, in time of prayer, during quiet study, while listening to music, or at many other times.
- A mountaintop experience is that occasion where you are drawn especially close to GOD, or are given some insight into GOD's grace or will for you.
- Mountaintop experiences happen when we least expect them, but also when we are most open to GOD's possibilities.
 - They happen when we put ourselves into GOD's hands in love and trust.
 - The disciples were ready for whatever JESUS would show them,
 - but none of them ever expected what happened.

Things that get in the way of mountaintops actually come from us:

- our own agendas and preoccupations, or our expectations of what GOD should do can block out what GOD is actually doing.

One of the things that the mountaintop of the Transfiguration can teach us is the importance of not questioning but accepting and rejoicing in what GOD gives us, even if it doesn't fit with our vision for the future.

- On the mountaintop, Moses was told to go back to Egypt where he was wanted for murder.
- On the mountaintop of a tall sycamore tree, Zacchaeus was told that he had to host JESUS for dinner.
- On the mountaintop of the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were told that they had to go to Jerusalem where JESUS would die.
 - Consider what would have happened if none of them had trusted in GOD's call>>>the invitation of GOD on the mountaintop.

Trusting GOD, though, leads to ministries.

Mountaintops call us and prepare us for ministry.

- They give us the vision for what GOD wants to do, no matter how crazy it may seem.
 - But mountaintops are rarely where ministry happens.
 - GOD's call most often sends us back down into the valleys where the needs are the greatest.

The disciples wanted to stay on the mountain.

- They wanted to build shelters and camp out there with these great people.
- JESUS, however, knew that the real need was down the mountain and ultimately on the cross.
 - When we encounter GOD on the mountaintop, we also have to understand that GOD is going to send us back down to the ministries that must be done.

As I've already said, worship can be one of the mountaintops where we encounter GOD.

- It is where we glimpse GOD's vision for ourselves and for our church.
- It is where we are prepared for what GOD wants us to do.

But we also need to realize that a mountaintop vision will likely send us out of the building to return to the valleys of our lives,

- because it is in those places that GOD may most be needed.
 - That's one reason why we close our worship with the words, "Go in peace. Remember the poor. Go to a weary world. Share the good news. CHRIST is with you."
 - What happens in here prepares us for what we GOD wants us to do out there.

That may seem intimidating and overwhelming at times.

- But mountaintops and ministries lead us to one more truth revealed in the Transfiguration:
 - GOD still does miracles in our world and through us.

What miracles can you name from the Bible that happen on mountaintops?

- The Transfiguration; the burning bush; the Ten Commandments; the crucifixion.
 - But then think about the miracles in the Bible that happen in the valleys?
 - Healings of lepers and blind and lame; casting out demons; feeding the 5,000; storms calmed; the dead raised; water into wine; the resurrection.

Miracles happen in common places, when JESUS is among the people.

- And as His hands and with His words, we can be the instruments through which miracles happen in the lives of others.

JESUS coming to me in the hospital was indeed a miracle, but it was not the only miracle that happened to me there.

- I experienced the miracle of GOD's love and presence in my life through the ministry and service of doctors and nurses who cared for me, and friends and family who visited me and sent me cards and letters.
 - And even, though we may not see it or ever know it, our service to others may be a miracle in their lives that can bring them closer to the presence of GOD.

Mountaintops are rare, but worship can be a little mountaintop for us each week.

- Worship is one of the places where we encounter GOD.
- Worship is an opportunity to hear where GOD desires for us to go.
- Worship is a special time to be equipped with GOD's vision for a future of which we can be a significant part.
- Worship is a chance to witness the miracle of faith shared together around GOD's table, to be prepared and equipped for what lies ahead,
 - and then to be sent out in faith to the valleys where we are so desperately needed.

Today, you answered JESUS invitation to come to the mountaintop.

- I pray that you are richly blessed here by the amazing possibilities of GOD.
 - It may not have been Moses or Elijah that you encountered here,
 - but JESUS is certainly present,
 - and here that you will be fed,
 - and from here that you are sent,
 - sent to do what no one else can,
 - equipped with possibilities of GOD,
 - and accompanied by the LORD HIMSELF.

Thank you for coming to the mountaintop today.