

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY February 26th 2017

MOOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS

A Meditation by Peggy Jensen

Prayer: Creator God, your snow-capped mountains are awesome and the quiet green valleys are refreshing. Sometimes the mountains are obstacles too high to overcome and sometimes the valleys of our lives are very dark and depressing. Show us the way so we understand that the path of life leads us up to mountain tops and down into valleys, but where ever we are we are not alone. God , you are with us always. Inspire us as we listen for your word today. Amen

This is the last Sunday of Epiphany since Christmas we have been looking into the light and life of Jesus. We have travelled from Jesus birth, through the stories of his ministry, to this moment of transfiguration on the mountaintop. Epiphany, the season of light, and now we enter another season of the church year, Lent. So Transfiguration Sunday, this day in the church year to think about where we have been and where we are going. Every journey has some high points and low points,, like mountains and valleys. Life journeys are never just one smooth straight line, are they?

The scriptures today offer two mountain top experiences, let's look at each of them. In the Exodus passage, the LORD extends an invitation to come up the mountain and receive the tablets. So Moses told his people to wait, then Moses went up the mountain and waited 6 days until the Lord called Moses out of the cloud into God's glory. For the people below the mountain top looked like a devouring fire, God's glory. And Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and nights.

I don't know how you interpret this image but if I was a follower of Moses and saw him enter that fiery glory, I would never expect to see Moses again. Wait-- this picture is painted with many symbolic images. Like 6 days of creation, then God called. 40 days of being with God, like the 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert. Now we enter 40 days of Lent. The symbolic mountain top experience for Moses leads us to the mountain top experience with Jesus.

“Six days later, Jesus took Peter and James and his brother John with him up the mountain, and while the friends waited Jesus was transfigured before them, dazzling bright white lights. Then Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Jesus. Moses, the proclaimer of the law and Elijah, representing the prophets. Suddenly a bright cloud over shadowed them and a voice said “This is my Son, the beloved, with him, I am well pleased, listen to him.” . The disciples were overcome by fear! Jesus came and touched them and said “ **Do not be afraid**”

Can you imagine the fear and excitement of the disciples as they suddenly saw Moses and Elijah with Jesus? Or do you dismiss this as just another illusion?

The account of Jesus transfiguration seems strange to our minds conditioned by Western culture and the obsession to understand events scientifically.

Can we look past the scientific facts and see this as a Spiritual experience?

Douglas John Hall writes:

We cannot know what that occasion was really like, or even that it happened –in terms of its “facticity” Certainly we are not required to turn the biblical account into fact! For what is significant in the account is not its “special effects” but what it affirms about the early church’s foundational belief about Jesus: namely, that he was not just another exceptional human being, prophet or great teacher and example for all , but the decisive representation of the Divine, the source and judge of life. As one of the disciples declared of Jesus “ You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

So I invite you to move past the hard to believe facts and think about the meaning of the Transfiguration. How did this encounter with the Holy prepare the disciples for Jesus death and resurrection? Did a vision of Jesus with prophets who died centuries before assure them of life after death? Do you see the connection? The words and images of transfiguration and resurrection together. Jesus was trying to help his disciples prepare for his death. And if you think about how these transfiguration accounts were written long after Jesus death, it does help to understand resurrection and life after death.

The transfiguration affirms Jesus’ divinity; it also begins to give the disciples eyes to see God’s light in the chaos to come death, loss, fear and resurrection, even the work of the early church. The transfiguration story reminds us that all of life has moments of Joy and sorrow.

Can you think of mountaintop experiences in your life? A life changing moment may not have been on top of a mountain but you felt the exhilaration and excitement. NO one stays on the mountain top forever. Yes Moses came down and shared the ten commandments with his people and you know where the story goes from there. Jesus came down the mountain with his friends and told them not to tell anyone about the vision. The rest of that story is history too.

It is a reality of life that we are not able to stay on the top of the mountain! At some point we all return to the valley. What are the valleys in your life? Are you dealing with a health issue, a physical disability, a family crisis that makes your heart ache, too much to do and too little time to do it in?

I want to share a short story by Judy Johnson, who is a member of Trinity United in Port Coquitlam, but it is a “valley” story that anyone of us might relate to in one way or another. Judy writes: *“The year 1986 was awful. Cancer took my mother. While away at her funeral, my job was downsized. Six months later, Dad died from a heart attack after exploratory surgery. And when I returned home, the divorce papers were in the mailbox. Each time I felt like God backed up and took another run at me!*

I was a mess. I had no close family, besides, my problems weren’t special. Everyone has his or her own hurts to bear. I muddled along, merely existing. Close friends gently supported me. Tangible and intangible gifts, came my way. I marvelled at the help offered by others in my church community. Friends stood watch and kept me company. One friend wrote:

We are not on this earth to see through each other, We are here to see each other through. *On this healing journey I experienced the mercy and understanding of others. God’s love came through those who surrounded me with caring listening and sharing.*

This is the powerful presence of God working through a faith community. We are here to help each other through the valleys of life. We know the Psalmist’s words.:

“ even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me”

Sometimes we are the one who God calls to walk in the valley with another. I have seen that happen so often here in this faith community, through the prayer chain, or a phone call or a neighbour just checking next door. There are many little ways that you care for each other.

You are the hands and feet of Christ serving each other's needs.

Each of us has the God given gift to help our neighbour through the valleys, continue your good work.

Did you notice that "Jesus *touched* the disciples and said *Do not be afraid.*"?

The power of the touch of a hand

This is the way that God comes into the world: not simply the brilliant cloud of mystery, not only a voice thundering from heaven, but also a human hand laid upon a shoulder and the words "**Do not be afraid.**" God comes to us quietly, in unexpected ways and through unexpected people.

Another Psalm that came to mind this week was Psalm 121:

"I lift my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth." .On a clear day the Coast Mountains we see are breathtaking!

Mountains and valleys are part of creation and we need both. Sometimes our valleys can be green and flourishing with beauty and leading us in new directions. Sometimes our mountains are obstacles too high to overcome. It is all about our perspective and how we see the challenges of life. God is with us in all the experiences of our lives. Through prayer and patience we can see changes happen. By the grace of God the valleys are lifted up and the mountains are made low.

We may not be able to understand the scientific facts of the Transfiguration but we can accept the spiritual meaning. With Christ's presence in our lives, amazing changes can happen and we are reassured that God's son, the Beloved is with us. Thanks be to God.