



“Ain’t no mountain high enough, ain’t no valley deep enough, ain’t no river wide enough to keep me from loving you.” Whether you like Marvin Gaye’s or Dianna Ross’s or someone’s else’s rendition, these lyrics also remind us that there is nothing that can keep God from loving us. There is nothing that can keep God away from us.

Mountains, mountains, mountains are everywhere in the readings today. The Collect and each of the readings mention mountains. Mountains symbolize many things- among them the feeling that on top of a mountain we are closer to God than is true at sea level. This may be in part because from a mountaintop you can often see for miles and the struggle to get to the top tends to burn away normal everyday cares as you focus on simply getting to the top.

The Celts believed that some places- very often mountains – were “thin places” - places where the barrier between this world and the next were “thin” - places where strange and wonderful things could happen if you were open to mystery - places where you could be forever changed.

We sing about mountains in pop culture and in our hymns: “O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesties...” (H719). Mountains are special places for us – whether close up or seen on the horizon. People have climbed mountains from the beginning of time. Indeed, when someone asked Sir Edmund Hilary why he climbed Mt. Everest, the response was “because it is there.” Mountains draw us to them. We remember: Moses on Mt. Sinai; Elijah on Mt. Carmel; Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Getting to the top of a mountain takes work. No Superman leaping to the top of tall mountains in a single bound, but walking steadily upwards, as the air thins, as the sun becomes hotter and sunburn more likely. Or snowstorms suddenly blow up and a complete whiteout means you can’t see your feet in front of you. The very unpredictability is part of what draws people, including me, to hike in the wilderness.

Mount Washington in New Hampshire is the highest peak east of the Mississippi although pretty small if you think about the Rockies, the Sierras and Denali. But, Mount Washington is famous for its unpredictable – and often brutal- weather. The highest winds have been recorded there: 231 miles per hour in 1934. Wind-chill was **minus** 103 degrees in 2004. And the clouds often cover the top of the mountain. Mt. Washington is also known as **Agiocochook**, or "Home of the Great Spirit". This is another example of people believing that God resides on the mountain top.

Jesus took James and John and Peter and led them up the mountain. Did Jesus tell them ahead of time why he wanted to go up the mountain? Did any of them complain about the hike- how much water do we need to take, how long will we be gone, I don't have the right shoes – I'll get blisters? Maybe since this occurred just six days after Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, they didn't. But knowing what we do about Peter and James and John, I suspect they had questions and they probably whined a bit. Like us, they probably wanted to be in control and to know all the details so they could decide whether or not to say yes. And, Jesus, as with us, asks us to trust him. To go with him on a journey with an undisclosed destination. To trust that God will provide what we need- probably less than we want but it will be what we need.

And what about the others –the ones not asked to go up the mountain? Did any of them feel left behind – or maybe relieved? I'm betting that none of Peter, James or John expected what happened. Yes, each of them knew their scriptures. They each knew that Moses was the giver of the law- the giver of the teachings about how to live that God gave to Moses during his time on Mt. Sinai. They each knew the Elijah was a great prophet – one who also had mountain top experiences. And Elijah would return to herald in the Messiah. So there on that mountaintop, Peter, James and John saw Moses – the giver of the law. And Elijah – the prophet who would announce the coming of the Messiah. The past: the prophets, and the present: Jesus – together.

And what does Peter do? Thickheaded, impetuous but good hearted Peter: “Lord, ... if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Can't you just see it – slap upside the head! “Duh!” Didn't you just call me Messiah- the anointed one? Don't you remember that I told you that I come not to abolish but to fulfill all the law and the prophets? And why is Moses here but to show that I am the fulfillment of the law. And why is Elijah here but to point to me as the long-awaited Messiah. Don't you get it?”

And from the cloud comes the voice of God once again: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well-pleased; listen to him!” And Peter, James and John fell to the ground and were overcome with fear. Maybe that was an “ah ha” moment – the moment when they really, **really** realized that this man Jesus – the one they had been with, the one who had healed the blind, the lame, the deaf, the one who had raised people from the dead, the one who preached and taught about the coming of the kingdom of God: maybe this Jesus was the real deal and they **finally** understood. The words spoken at the baptism in the river Jordan: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased” (Mt. 3:17). Those words, repeated nearly verbatim here on the Mount of Transfiguration, drive home that Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

We are to listen to what Jesus has to say. We -like Moses when he came down from Mt. Sinai- can be transfigured and our faces will glow with the glory of God. Listening to God and living a life consistent with the teaching of God revealed first through Moses and then through Jesus will transform us. If we truly listen to Jesus and take to heart what he calls us to do, our lives will be transformed.

It's not easy to live a life that follows Jesus. It's not easy to constantly be aware that we, who have been given so much, are commanded to give to the poor, to feed the hungry, to visit those

who are sick. But this is what Jesus does for us – so how can we complain when Jesus asks us to follow him and to live the life he modeled for us? Jesus sees that Peter, James and John are afraid- they fell to the ground and were overcome with fear. And what does Jesus do? Does he ridicule their fear? No – he reaches out to touch them. And touching them, their fear goes away.

They stand up once again to follow Jesus, the Beloved, the one with whom God is pleased. Peter, James, John and we ourselves are reminded once again to listen to Jesus. And, listening to Jesus, to be transformed.

Getting to the top of a mountain takes work. We aren't always successful in reaching the summit. But if you ever have, and if you've ever looked out across the vista, it's likely your breath has been taken away at the wonders created by God. At the sense of how small we are in comparison to nature. And perhaps you've also felt closer to God at that moment.

Take with you the mountain-top experience. Take with you the remembrance that God tells us, not once but over and over again that Jesus is his Beloved, and we are to listen to him. Take with you the knowledge that just as Jesus reached out and touched Peter, James and John, Jesus reaches out and touches us. Do not be afraid. Be transformed and let the light of God show in your face and in your life.

“Ain't no mountain high enough, ain't no valley deep enough, ain't no river wide enough, to keep God from loving you.” Be transformed- be transfigured - knowing that nothing can separate you from the love of God. *Amen.*