

## MOUNTAIN-TOP FAITH



**Scripture:**

**Psalm 50:1-6**

<sup>1</sup>The mighty one, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.  
<sup>2</sup>Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.  
<sup>3</sup>Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him. <sup>4</sup>He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: <sup>5</sup>“Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” <sup>6</sup>The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. *Selah*

**Mark 9:2-10**

<sup>2</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.  
<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



### MOUNTAIN-TOP FAITH

A few chosen disciples join Jesus on a mountain top, where they witness him in conversation with prominent figures from their

faith history. They see Jesus’ appearance change in a way that could not be duplicated on earth. And they hear the very voice of God declaring Jesus’ identity as the beloved of God.

I bet they questioned their sanity. What do you bet?

I was on a mountain top in Turkey just five days ago. It was the mountain where the archeologists found what they believe was the home and burial plot of the Mother Mary. The mountain was called Mount Nightingale near Ephesus because Florence Nightingale and thirty-eight nurses went to Turkey during the Crimean War. She helped them establish four hospitals in and around Istanbul and greatly improved the care of wounded soldiers.

Did you know Mary, the mother of Jesus, has an important role in Islamic culture and religious tradition? There are many verses in the Quran relating to Mary which are frequently inscribed on various mosques, including the Hagia Sophia. Mary and Jesus are not considered divine in the Islam faith, but they are revered as holy and righteous. Surprising?

### **CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION**

So in this passage, Peter finds himself one of the chosen who accompanies Jesus on the mountaintop for Christ's transfiguration. The glorification of Christ, making him pure white and glowing, was like a purification ceremony preparing him for his crucifixion. It must have been a mysterious and spectacular sight!

Peter responds to the mysterious happenings on the mountain by offering to build three dwellings for them. Peter wants to capture this moment, hoping to make it last just a little while longer. He was mesmerized by the light and the presence of Elijah and Moses, and the mysterious glory of it all.

We often don't spend a lot of time on the mountain-top do we? Most days we focus our minds on the work in the world. We might wonder what Jesus would do in certain circumstances that happen to us during the day. And yet, much like those disciples, we get only a glimpse of what Jesus is presently doing and how his transfigured self encourages us to transform as God would have us be. The shining transforming light of Christ is marked by a cloud of mystery, which makes it a bit

confusing about how we are to respond to the transfigured Christ.

### **THE GLORY OF GOD**

Peter got confused and so do we. Peter is an example of confused humanity in the presence of the glory of God.

But Jesus was not confused. He went up on the mount to prepare for his death. It was a pep rally of sorts with Elijah and Moses reassuring him of his path of faith and strengthening him to persevere.

**Have you ever needed  
reassurance about your  
ability to persevere in an ordeal?  
Perhaps you have seen the  
transforming presence of Jesus in the  
eyes of your friends who comforted  
you in your times of need.  
Maybe you saw the glory of God  
shining brightly in the sunrise  
or sunset when you  
were feeling depressed.  
Or maybe you felt God calming  
you when you were afraid of what  
might happen in the future.**

In small ways whenever and wherever the past meets the present and sends us into the future with hope, that is the transforming power of God. Those moments carry something of the light of Jesus and a cloud of mystery with them.

That is what happened on that mountain-top where the disciples first saw Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah. Jesus became the light itself on that first Transfiguration Day.

The mountain top faith experience waiting for each one of us is not some far off place like Turkey that we must trek to. It is right here. It can be in this sacred place where you can explore your faith and learn more about Jesus, the Bible and prayer just by being involved in our Lenten programs and worship services, Bible studies and fellowship for example.

## WE WONDER

But there is always a sense of doubt that trails along with us isn't there. Don't we wonder if this story of the transfiguration is literally true? Or was it just a story with a greater message meant for us to apply to our lives today?

The Lenten season is a perfect time to seek out a mountain-top faith and work on our relationship with God. The rest of this chapter in Mark shows us how, by believing and receiving God's grace-filled healing love.

After this passage, Mark 9 describes how Christ came down the mountain all transfigured and purified and the first thing he did was?? Can you guess? He healed the boy who had seizures and could not speak. Jesus the healer went back to his main work of healing as soon as he came back to his people. And in this healing, Jesus tells the father of the boy, "All things can be done for those who believe." And the father replies, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

**Don't we all have a level of unbelief underneath our belief? That is part of being a thinking feeling human. We always have a bit of doubt underneath our faith. Doubt always accompanies faith, refining it and making it clear.**

### DR. CRAIG BARNES

My friend, Dr. Craig Barnes, who was my previous pastor at National Presbyterian Church, once said, "What really plagues us is not the questions we have about the existence and power of God. Those doubts don't cause us anxiety. What we really doubt is that God truly loves us."

Barnes goes on to say that when the church proclaims the grace of God, it doesn't mean that God will forgive us only if we can muster enough belief to come back to him. What grace really means is that Jesus Christ has come looking for us and on the cross he found us. Now our job is not to just believe in that grace

but it is to truly accept God's love and receive that grace into our souls.

How would you live your life differently if you truly believed that you were totally unconditionally forgiven and loved by God? How would you be transfigured if you truly trusted that all that awaits you after death was love?

## VALENTINE'S DAY

God's love is here for you now and love is waiting for you in the end of your time on this earth. Everyday should be a love-filled day, like on Valentine's Day.

According to the History.com website, the first love letter, signed, "Your Valentine" was sent from an imprisoned priest named Valentine to a young girl. She was the jailor's daughter who had befriended the priest after he was jailed for protesting the Roman prison's harsh treatment of Christian prisoners.

Another legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served when Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers so he outlawed marriage for young men. The priest Valentine defied the Emperor and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

As a result of these two legends about love and death, we celebrate love on this weekend every year. Love is powerful. Love prevails. Despite the Roman Empire's best efforts, the pure love of Jesus Christ still wins in the end. Amen



**Benediction:**

**Will You Be My Valentine?  
By Joyce Rupp**

**"Jesus speaks to me:  
Will you be my valentine?  
Will you be my friend?  
Will you let me give you my  
unconditional love?  
Will you accept my peace for your  
tired and worn self?  
Will you receive my mercy  
and forgiveness?  
Will you believe in my love when  
everyone else has gone away  
or given up on you?  
Will you be generous enough  
to take my love to others  
when they need you?  
Will you be bread to my hungry,  
love to my needy,  
hope to my desolate?  
Will you love yourself well and  
believe in the gifts I've given you?"**

**Will you trust me to  
always companion you?  
Will you lay down your life for me?  
Will you be my valentine?  
Will you be my friend?  
And may the grace of our Lord  
Jesus Christ, the love of God and the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with  
us now and forever more. Amen**



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405  
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