

Read also Exodus 33:12-23. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org. All the Scriptures, prayers, and music in the service support and illumine the message of this sermon.

Have you ever had one of those mountaintop experiences? They don't really have to happen on top of a mountain. A friend talked to me about doing her daily study for Lent. She would get into bed and read her devotional. One night, feeling lonely, she opened her book. While reading she became overwhelmed with Jesus' presence as He suddenly was there, filling her with great love and peace.

Once, my husband and I went skiing in Colorado. Everyone had gone to the top of the hill ahead of me. It was late. On the lift alone, the beauty of the silence was deafening. The snow-covered mountains just shouted out God's majesty. As I headed for the run, shadows stretching far across the snow, kind of a difficult run, I said, "Jesus, I'm alone. Would you please help me to get down the mountain." And I had a total sense of His presence. *Go this way, avoid those moguls. Let go here and enjoy!* And the beauty of his creation filled me in a way I had not experienced before. I can still "hear" the silence and feel the sacredness of that afternoon.

Another friend struggled with her husband's addictions. It was the middle of the night. Her husband was passed out in their car outside, six stepchildren asleep upstairs. Not knowing where to turn, she knelt down and prayed, "God, I don't even know if you exist. I need you. Are you there? Will you speak to me?" A verse she had learned as a child came immediately to mind, "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I've committed to him, until his return" (2 Tim. 1:12). Overwhelming peace came over her. She said, "I knew beyond a doubt He was speaking to me and He was really there." That moment carried her, and she even remembers it today.

Have you ever had one of those mountaintop experiences? Moments so powerful you just want to grab ahold of them? They are truly God's gifts to us.

Jesus announced one day to His disciples:

"I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!" (Mk 9:1).

A few days later, He took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain and they had a day beyond imagination where they saw the Kingdom of God. Alone with Him, they walked up and up.
READ Mark 9:2b-10

Others in the Bible have been in God's presence. You heard the story of Moses earlier. The Bible says, "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord." (Ex 34:5) And afterward, "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God . . . the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him" (v. 29b-30).

Elijah had a mountaintop experience with God. He also rode a chariot to heaven in a whirlwind, to return before the Messiah comes, ushering in His arrival. (2 Kgs. 2:1, Mal. 3:1)

These two men frame Israel's covenant with God. They are central prophets in the OT.

Moses's face shone. But the glory did not come from him; he merely reflected the glory of God from being with God. But Jesus emanated the incandescence of God from the inside. He wasn't reflecting it, as if God beamed down a godly ray on Him. He appeared as He was in heaven, before coming to earth. His divine nature was fully evident; He lets us see God's face in human form, and a little piece of heaven was revealed.

Peter described this experience in 2 Peter:

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets" (1:16-19).

Did you hear it? Spending this special time with Jesus built their faith. It was a most memorable time – something Peter cherished; that would carry him through.

You probably cherish your own mountaintop experiences. C. S. Lewis says we are desire them; I do. Your experiences and mine help our faith.

Let's think about that day for the disciples. There they were, and Peter blurts out, "Rabbi," (*I can't believe I just called Him Rabbi – good heavens, He's not just a teacher, He's God's Son, the Messiah, the Anointed One!*) "It's just awesome for us to be here. How about if we disciples make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (*Peter thinks, oh why did I say that? Am I nuts? What was I thinking? Ever feel like you say the wrong thing?*) And the cloud rolls in, overshadowing them . . .

"This is my Son, the Beloved; LISTEN TO HIM.

It's hard to listen when you are trying to be in charge.

The truth of the matter is they needed this mountaintop experience really badly. Jesus would suffer, be tortured and killed, before rising again. Circumstances would seem to deny everything the Messiah was about. The Messiah was supposed to bring peace, yet violence would predominate. The Messiah was supposed to right all the wrongs, yet injustice would prevail in both the civil justice system and the religious world. The Messiah was supposed to bring sight to the blind; yet no one would see who Jesus really was. The Messiah was supposed to unify people, yet all his friends would be scattered, running for their lives.

The disciples needed to know that even in the chaos, God was still in control. Even though Jesus would be killed as a common criminal, He was the King of heaven, the one glorified in front of them; the one who would return in power. They needed to see Him in power.

Those mountaintop experiences happen to assure us that Jesus is who He says He is.

My friend, whose husband was an addict, experienced many years of struggles. But she learned that her painful experiences did not mean Jesus was not real. Over the course of time she learned to take her anger and pain to Him. She learned to be honest about her past, and deal with her issues. She learned that when she saw Him as powerful and she let her emotions out to Him, it helped her to be calmer and more forgiving with her family.

Her faith was no longer on the outside; it was on the inside. She listened to Him and put His word inside of her. It began transforming her.

Peter wanted to build three tabernacles. Those shelters actually pointed back to how Israel celebrated the Exodus. Peter wanted to hang onto this event by building something. But God had different ideas and a different message. God knew they needed to go down the mountain and that residing in shelters would not last. It's not about building a tabernacle outside of us, but about an inward tabernacle, built in us by Jesus. It happens by listening to Jesus.

Paul tells us this very thing when he said, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corin. 6:19-20).

How do we let Him build that temple in us? We get away alone with Him. We open the Bible and take in its stories and lessons. We humbly accept what we read in faith. We question and seek answers. We come to church and learn from each other.

We get honest with Jesus. Once I went to hear a guest pastor speak at a church. His young son had died. He told of standing beside the open grave after the funeral, after everyone had left, and shaking his fist at heaven praying, "God, I hate you for doing this." And he heard these words, "You have been honest with me. That is good. Now I can heal your hurt." Right there he said he knew he would make it through because God heard; God was with him. And that voice carried him.

The disciples would experience genuine hurt, fear, and devastation when Jesus was stripped of all glory and crucified. But with time they began to see through the cross to the glorious purpose of God's Savior. They began to see this extraordinary love that would make such a sacrifice for them, and for us.

Moses could not see God's face and live. God was too pure and holy and glorious. But the disciples were in God's presence and did not die. That's because Jesus is the bridge; the way to God.

God said, "Listen to Him." Are you listening? He loves you so much that He desires to give you that closeness while He builds His life in yours. We must let the tabernacle be not outside us but within us. Take God's word in gladly; pray; then listen and respond with your all.

This is the way to increase your mountaintop experience, to know Jesus, alive and in full force. And as you do, He will appear to you, and you will find yourself transformed.

AMEN

