

Meditation Mountaintop Experiences

Please join me in prayer.

Hide me in your glory, gracious and loving God. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my redeemer, and my refuge. Amen.

Good morning! I am scared of heights, but I like going to high places to see the view – at least when I am not looking down. When we were kids, we would go to mountain-like places with the clouds touching the tip of it, and my older cousins would say that we are getting closer to heaven and to God. And because of that, I've loved going to mountains because I wanted to be physically close to God. Unfortunately, I am not a fan of hiking. But growing up, I would try to overcome my fear of heights, because I want to be closer to God.

Today's passage is a compelling tale of a mountaintop experience. Jesus and the disciples went up to the mountain, maybe to pray, or maybe Jesus knew that something is bound to happen. This passage is one of the cinematic scenes that happened in the life of Jesus. The author of the gospel of Mark has been quite descriptive of the transfiguration of Jesus. If we are to continue following the series of the life of Jesus, we are nearing the scenes of his suffering. Sometimes I find it odd that after a couple of months of the celebration of his birth, we will jump right into the story of his death. But of course, if we will look at the logic of this, this did not happen as fast as the church calendar retell the story of the life of Jesus.

We are now entering the Lenten Season. On Wednesday, we will be 'celebrating' Ash Wednesday. As a quick reminder, our Ash Wednesday Service will be broadcasted on the evening of February 17th, but Pastor Nancy and myself will be imposing ashes on the mid-morning of that day, 11am-2pm. There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the story of the lent. In the early Christian tradition, the story of the cross depicted the suffering of Jesus so that humanity will be saved. If we are to remember, Jesus died for our sins, because we were born sinners. We were told that Paul wrote in Romans 5:8 that yet we were sinners and Christ died for us because God loves us. As I came to many different interpretations of the Scripture in my classes in seminary, I have come to interpret this verse differently now.

In the Filipino tradition, Christian churches prepare the people for lent, in a way that they/we are focusing on the suffering of Jesus. This means that back in the Philippines, people are gearing up towards abstinence as a form of solidarity in the life of Christ. The logic is this, if we are Christians, then we are supposed to follow the life of Christ, and this includes abstaining from sins in as much as people can do it. There are places in the Philippines who would dramatize the passion narrative up to the extent of people, mostly men, flagellating themselves, and even being literally nailed to the cross. I don't mean to shorten our Lenten Season and jump right into the Holy Week, but the reason that I mentioned this, was because as early as this time, Jesus was aware of what the future holds. In verse 9, Jesus 'ordered' the disciples to tell no one about what they saw until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. He did not request them to be quiet for the time being, he ordered them. The divine nature of Jesus is fully aware that he will soon die. What a dreadful feeling to have. But circling back to the Lenten Season which we will be embarking on in a couple of days, we will be journeying into the way of the cross. The cross that symbolizes the suffering of Jesus, reflecting into our own lives, and inviting us into repenting on the things that we

need to repent for. I would like to clarify one thing though, my invitation for repentance is not because I know what your sins are. Whatever they are, it is between you and God. I am not a mediator for you and God. Like you, I am also human and have the tendency to be sinful. And those sins like what I have mentioned is between God and in this case – myself. Like what I have mentioned in the past, your/our relationship with God is part of our personal holiness, and therefore it is between you/us and the divine.

But back to the idea of ‘the way of the cross’. As I recall, in all of the teaching that I had as a younger person, I have always taught that the way of the cross is the suffering of Jesus. And by experiencing suffering, we are becoming more like Jesus. This has been the justification that the oppressor have often taught the oppressed. That when a Christian suffers, he/she is becoming more Christlike. In my reflection, I personally am no longer embracing this thought, because suffering does not equate the grace, mercy, love and redemption that God gives us through Jesus Christ. As I continue my journey in understanding the life of Jesus, I am realizing that Jesus did not die to purge the world of sin and evil. Rather, Jesus died because the powers of evil sought to destroy his witness of nonviolent love, justice and truth. His death revealed, not only the evilness of evil – including the violence of his death, but more importantly the transforming power of divine love, a powerful assertive love that does not dominate and defeat evil so much as challenge, expose and seek to transform it. The love that is redemptive and saving. So, what does this mean then? This simply means that if we are to follow the way of the cross, we have to be more proactive in showing that love to the world. We are called to go out there – whether in the cold or not, to share that redeeming love to the world. It may sound very demanding, but if we are to look at it in our context, this simply means for us to continue to be the hands and the feet of God to the world extending that love to everybody and to all of God’s creation. More than praying, meditating on the word of God, more than accepting Jesus as our Savior, we are to reflect our relationship with God and with Christ with how we treat each other, the others, and God’s creation. Let me clarify that I am not saying that praying, Bible reading – even memorizing verses and salvation does not matter. My invitation for you is that all of these things should compel you to action – in sharing God’s love to the world.

And this is the mountaintop experience of Jesus. In the mountain, Jesus was transfigured. I checked the online dictionary, and transfiguration means a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful state. This happened with Moses, too. In Exodus 34:29, the skin of his face shone after he came down from Mt. Sinai, when he received the two tablets of the covenant. This text says that his face shone because he has been talking with God. The mountaintop experience of Jesus and Moses are experiences that called them to do God’s work. Now I agree with my older cousins when told me that I get closer to God when I am on top of a mountain. We all have mountaintop experiences. These are the experiences in our spiritual journey that we feel closer to God, and we also feel where God is calling us. God’s call, as I have come to realize later in life usually involves going out of one’s comfort zone. I personally encountered that. In this passage, we saw how God was really active/tangible/magical/maybe unbelievable for others in this mountaintop experience. There was a cloud, there was a voice, there were even ancient figures. Sometimes our mountaintop experience could be like this – it could be magical, dramatic, mundane or other people may not believe it. But more than the drama of our mountaintop experience, the most important thing is what do we do about it? Are we just going to stay in our comfort zones? Or will we choose to go down from the mountain to start the work that God is calling us to do? May it be so. Amen.