

Sermon: *Mountaintops*
Text: *Luke 9:28 – 36*
Date: *February 14, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

On May 29, 1953, at 11:30 in the morning, Sir Edmund Hillary and his friend, Tenzing Norgay, did something that no one else had ever done, something that Hillary called “The ultimate in achievement, the supreme challenge for flesh and blood and spirit.” After a two month expedition, Hillary and Norgay placed their four feet on the highest peak in the world, Mount Everest. 29,028 feet above sea level! And this is what they saw ...

Wow! Can you imagine the exhilaration? The thrill! The breathe-taking experience of standing on top of the world, seeing what nobody has ever seen and hearing what nobody has ever heard before?

In our text this morning, Jesus took Peter, James, and John on a special expedition. By this time, at least two years have passed since that day when He said: **“From now on you will be catching people.”** And oh, the things they had seen, the things they had heard and experienced! He had turned water into wine; He made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk; and they saw it all! He taught on the hillside to thousands and thousands of people and they heard it all. And then, one day, He asked them: *“What are people saying about me?”* And they said: *“Some say you’re Elijah or one of the prophets and some say you’re John the Baptist resurrected.”* And Jesus said: *“Well, what do you think?”* And Peter said: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”**

And then, eight days later, Jesus took these three disciples up the mountain and while He was praying, suddenly His clothes became dazzling white and His face flowed like the sun and He was transfigured before them. And Moses and Elijah appeared and talked to Jesus about His upcoming death in Jerusalem. And then, just as quickly as it all started, it was over and Jesus led them back down the mountain and He told them to tell no one about their experience.

Have you ever had a mountaintop experience? Has there ever been a time in your life – or maybe several times in your life – when you knew that you were in the presence of God, you knew something was happening unlike anything you’ve ever experienced? Well, that’s what I want us to think about this morning as we reflect on these verses from Luke’s Gospel.

First of all, mountaintop experiences are meant to teach us something about the divine. Verse 32 says: ***“They saw His glory.”*** You know, today is the Last Sunday of Epiphany. Six weeks ago, when we started the season of Epiphany, we said that Epiphany means manifestation or revelation; it’s the time in the Church Year when we explore the nature and identity of Jesus. And so, week by week, we’ve learned something new about Jesus. He is a light to the Gentiles; He is the Son of God; He is the One with power to transform water into wine; He is the Teacher and Miracle-worker; He is the One who calls us deeper. And each step along the way, the disciples

saw a little more of His glory, but nothing compared to this. Suddenly, the layers of His humanity were peeled back and Peter, James, and John saw His divinity. Listen to how John described it later: **“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Have you experienced God? Have you seen His glory? Maybe it happened on a weekend retreat or on the Walk to Emmaus!? Maybe it was on a mission trip!? Maybe it happened in a Worship Service or a Confirmation Class!? Or maybe it happened in the stillness of your bedroom ... but somehow and somewhere – in the midst of an ordinary day – God broke in! And maybe you felt differently or you saw things differently and maybe you said to yourself: *“I’ll never be the same again.”*

That’s what happens when we have an encounter with God. Our eyes are opened and our ears are made more attentive by an experience with the divine.

Second, mountaintop experiences cannot be manipulated or reproduced! I just love Peter. Look at his reaction to this experience with God: **“Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us build three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”** You see, Peter wanted to capture the moment, to prolong the experience, to build a shrine where he could come back from time to time and revisit the experience.

There is something within each of us that longs for intimacy with God. We all want to have an experience with the divine and when it happens, we want it to last. In 1970, at Asbury College, the student body gathered for an ordinary chapel service, but something extraordinary happened. That chapel service lasted 24 hours a day for the next two weeks as young men and women and their professors and administrators fell on their faces before God. And after that, ministry teams left Asbury and spread the story all across the United States. And since that day, every student who goes to Asbury wonders: "*When is it going to happen again? and what can we do to make it happen?*" And the trust is: it may never happen again ... and if it does, it may not happen just like it did before.

Sir Edmund Hillary spent 15 minutes on the top of Mount Everest. 15 minutes! This is something he dreamed about, something he planned and trained for and he spent 15 minutes at the top. And, he never did it again!

You see, you cannot manipulate or reproduce an experience with God ... but there are some things we can do to put ourselves in a place where God can move in us and in our church. Let me just mention two: ***first, pray!*** Verse 28 tells us Jesus and these three disciples went up on the mountain "*to pray and as He was praying, the appearance of His face changed and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.*" Prayer isn't magic and prayer can't be used to manipulate God, but prayer puts us in the presence of

God and gives God the opportunity to work in our lives.

Second, read the Word! Verse 35 says: “A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son ... listen to Him.’” The primary way that you and I encounter God and hear Him speak to us is through scripture. And every time we pick up the Bible and read it, we come face to face with God because the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself.

Pray and read the Word! You can’t capture the moment; you can recreate past experiences, but you can have an experience with God.

Then, let me mention one more thing about mountaintop experiences: ***third, mountaintop experiences are meant to lived out in the real world.*** Verse 36 says: “When the voice had spoken, they found Jesus alone ... and the next day, they came down from the mountain and a large crowd met them.”

They came back down the mountain and the very first thing that happened is a man came forward with a son who had “an unclean spirit.” And the disciples tried to cast help the boy but they couldn’t, but Jesus spoke the word and the evil spirit left the boy forever.

You know, many times immediately after a mountaintop we experience a time of testing. Something will happen that gives us an opportunity to live out in the real world what we’ve learned on the mountain. It might be a hurting friend or a hungry neighbor, but God is going to put someone in your path that needs to hear the story and experience the transformation that has taken place in your life.

That's when you know your mountaintop experience was real – when it transfers into the real world. That's why John Wesley said that the real proof of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is not screaming and shouting and running the aisles but it's healing the hurting and helping the hounded. Does your mountaintop experience translate into the real world? That's the question.

The Mountain

By Steven Curtin Chapman

I would love to live upon this mountain
And keep the pain of living life so far away
But I know I can't stay – upon the mountain

I said I'd go, Lord, wherever you lead
For where you are is where I most wanna be
And I can tell we're headed for the valley, yes we are.

My faith is strengthened by all that I've seen
So Lord help me remember what you've shown me
Upon on the mountain – Yeah

You bring me up here on the mountain
For me to rest and learn and grow
I see the truth up on the mountain
And I carry it to the world far below
So as I go down to the valley
Knowin that you will go with me
This is my prayer Lord:
Help me remember what you've shown me
Upon the mountain.