

February 7 2016 Year C Last Sunday after Epiphany / Transfiguration

Scripture Lessons ~

*Psalm 99*

*Exodus 34:29-35*

*Luke 9:28-36*

Sermon *Coping with Life's Up's and Down's*

I don't know if this is true for men slightly older than I, just slightly older at Whitworth College in my sophomore year, but it was particularly important to me in the process of my faith development because during that year the chaplain of the college decided set the goal for himself to try to get every single student in college involved in some sort of small group Bible Study program. Now often these kinds of things are requisites for disaster. We were assigned the book of Philippians. We were assigned a leader and meeting place. We assigned seven or eight members of our group carefully balanced between male and female. We were assigned a date and length of time to meet. Now the chances of this thing coming off successful must have been pretty grim. But as we met together for the first time we discovered something kind of special, something clicked, we had an awful lot in common in the diverse group that we were. Our personalities were somehow compatible; we had similar goals for our own spiritual goals of development in the future. So for what initially looked like something that would turn out to be a total disaster became a year and half of a wonderful time spent together. It was a time of learning and growth for me. It was a time of support and nurture; a time that I have never been able to duplicate no matter how hard during the course of my life and I tried time and time again. So why isn't every single small study group equaling uplifting? Why doesn't every hymn stab us with joy? Or every sermon inspires us to the heights. Or why doesn't every prayer make us feel as if we were bowing at the very throne of God? Why can't we always on the mountain top of life?

I think that must have been how Peter must have felt on the day of Jesus' transfiguration? Talk about a spiritual high when the disciples climbed up the mountain to pray with Jesus; and suddenly the heavens itself opened up before them and they saw Jesus in the way they had never seen him before. Can't you just imagine Peter's thoughts? He might have been thinking this is real discipleship; it sure beats traipsing from towns to town in Galilee preaching to those apathetic crowds. This is the real thing; this is what I signed up for when I started to follow Jesus. Of course we can only guess what he was thinking but we do know what he said out loud he said, "Lord I am so glad I am here with you. Let me build a little hut for you and for Moses and for Elijah". In other words, let us just stay up here Lord. Let us just camp out and keep on soaking up all this wonderful glory; let us

never go down. But of course they did not stay on the mountain for long as the glory of the day dissipated. The glory of God echoed away into a kind of silence in few minutes and it was all over and down the mountain they all went. You know that is how life is. We don't live on a constant high with our relationship with God, we have peaks and we have valleys. We have bright lofty moments when our prayers seemed filled with power; when God's will becomes crystal clear and living for Jesus is as natural and effortless as our taking the next breathe. And then we trudge back into valley where the shades are gray often avail. It is harder to hang on to sense of God's presence; it is harder to hang on to a sense of God's purpose. And our prayers often leave us feeling we were talking to a busy signal. But you know that is all right because walking through the valley is just as active discipleship as climbing those tall mountains and maybe even more so.

Notice when the transfiguration is over the disciples are ready to follow Jesus right back down that hill. They don't wally galy around. They don't beg for more and they don't try to prolong that moment; they just follow Jesus back down. Let's face it most of the time discipleship is pretty much the matter of putting one foot in front of the other and doing the best we can to follow Jesus down the common dusty road of life. It is not always exciting we don't usually hear the Mormon tabernacle choir in the background. I took a trip to Europe one time, and we were visiting various sites in town related to the sound of music and we heard the sound of music in the background and everybody thought they were in heaven as they went down the road but real life doesn't work that way. Most of us never have experiences dramatic enough to print up in Guide Post Magazine. But that's not why we became disciples is it? Not for the sake of spiritual thrills; not for the sake spiritual ecstasy. We follow Jesus because we love Jesus most of all or we want to try to love Jesus most of all. We follow Jesus because we want to serve him because it is the right thing to do whether or not that it makes us to feel good every single day or not. We pray to God because we know that God hears us whether it feels that way or not but somehow we have convinced ourselves that the effectiveness of our prayers depending upon generating some kind of high feeling to go along with those prayers but it doesn't have to be so because God is near us whether we feel God's presence at that particular time or not. The important thing is to pray especially if you are not in the mood for praying at all. You know Peter wanted to stay on the mountain to build some huts and he wanted to bask in the glow but Peter didn't and neither can we stay in the heights all the time at least not here or not right now.

It is easy to follow Jesus when we are on top of the world but in the common place things when there is no cloud of glory, when there is no thundering voice, when it is hard to make a commitment to keep going then it is back to our faith when it matters the most. But is it true to say that Peter, James and John did go

down the mountain. It is also just as true that Jesus went down the mountain with them side by side.

You know what was waiting for them in the valley when they got to the bottom; a demon had possessed a little child. An experience that turned out to be far stronger than any of the disciples could cope with; and that is what happens in the valley, a thing of danger, a thing of corruption a thing of grief a thing that was way too strong for them to handle alone but they didn't go alone Jesus went with them side by side. Jesus is Lord was not only at the bright mountain top of life but also in shadow-filled valley of life as well. You see the disciples didn't need to be afraid because they were not leaving Jesus up on that mountain. He was coming right back down with them. And we don't need to be afraid either because we don't leave Jesus in our prayers, we don't leave Jesus when we close our Bible, we don't leave him behind in church or at this communion table today or even in a small group Bible study; Jesus comes with us where ever we go in life. We might not always feel his presence but if we have to choose between relying on our feelings and relying on what we know about Jesus. I make it clear where you should place your trust, if Jesus is truly who he said, he is and Jesus is truly with us in those valleys of life quite simply there is nothing to be afraid of. There is nothing in this life or death or in the life to come that we should fear. Like the disciples we all treasure those wonderful moments in God's presence that are particularly real and particularly moving. Moments that sometimes comes in prayer, sometimes it comes in the breaking of bread sometimes it comes in completely unexpected moments so we are thankful for every single bit of mountain top experience of God's love but in between those times down in the valley where we have to admit is where most of life is lived, we are encouraged to be best possible disciples that we can be, clinging to the faithfulness that keeps us walking with Jesus; clinging to the faith of promises that Jesus is walking with each one of us always, always every step of the way. Together we say AMEN.