

Last Sunday after Epiphany
Year C

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12 - 4:2

Luke 9:28-43

One of the things I enjoyed living in Montana and Colorado was being able to look out and see the mountains. When I wanted to just get away for a few hours or a weekend, I took the short trip and was soon in the vastness of the Rockies. For me, a trip up the mountains was an opportunity to be refreshed, to get retuned, and to be recharged. The mountains have always been a place of spiritual renewal for me.

In many cultures of the world, mountain tops are associated with the divine. Throughout history, people have been going to the mountains to seek their gods, or spiritual insights. Stories of vision quests frequently mention going out, seeking a place alone on a mountain, to communicate with the spirit world.

Going up a mountain is a special journey in scripture also. In the reading from Exodus, Moses goes up the mountain to meet God. It is on the mountain top that he is given the Law to bring to the people of Israel. It is on the mountain top that Moses comes face-to-face with God. It is on this same mountain that Elijah has his confrontation with God. It is small wonder that we consider mountains the dwelling place of God, or at least the place to grow near to God.

Frequently in the gospels, we see Jesus retreat up a mountain to pray to the Father. We see it in the reading from Luke's Gospel today. Jesus takes His inner circle of disciples with Him to go up the mountain to pray. I don't know if He suspected anything special to happen that day, but we read that Jesus had an interaction with God.

Because of these biblical experiences, mountain tops have become places we view as sacred. We talk about having a mountain-top experience when something great happens in our life. But, as we read in Luke, there is more to life than these wonderful events. Yes, Peter suggested building dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so they could stay on the mountain. But, the Voice from Heaven had a better plan. We cannot stay on the mountain; we must come down. The Voice told the disciples to listen to Jesus. It is through listening that they would receive the message God had for them.

Thus, they came down from the mountain and were right back into the thick of ministry. This is the essence of ministry - we have wonderful high points that are immediately followed by the reality of life. But, it is in these ordinary situations that the value of those mountain top experiences is revealed. Life does not happen in the clouds - but here on earth. Ministry does not happen in the clouds, but in the midst of people here. The son in the story would never have been healed if Jesus had stayed on the mountain top. Jesus had to come down from the mountain, just as Moses had centuries earlier.

Like Jesus, our ministry is here in the midst of the people. While it is good to take time out and experience the mountain tops occasionally, it is here, in Ozark and the surrounding area, that we are called to minister. It is here that the child needs to be healed. It is here that the hungry need to be fed. Go to the mountain to be refreshed, but remember that it is at the bottom of the hill that the real work of ministry happens. It is among the people who are in need that we are to serve.