

We have all heard of the phrase “Mountaintop Experience?” Such experiences can take on many forms, moments where we consider ourselves to be “on top of the world”. **These are moments in our lives where there’s cause for great joy, celebration, and the feeling that nothing can get better than this!** That is the Mountain Top Experience that we are talking about.

In our Gospel reading for this morning, we read of a **“mountaintop experience”** that **Peter, James, and John had with Jesus**. As we look at this mountaintop experience, we’ll learn that the focus isn’t so much about the moment, but about what was spoken to them on that mountaintop and where Jesus was headed once he left that mountain.

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain, perhaps to find some solitude and quiet. Then, suddenly, it happens! **Moses and Elijah are present on that mountain, appearing out of nowhere, and they’re talking with Jesus!** **Now there’s something you don’t see every day. Moses had died approximately 1400 years before this event took place, and Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a chariot about 850 years earlier. Yet here they are.** Now that had to have been an impressive sight for these three disciples! It had to have been a moment like no other they’d experienced in their lives up to that point.

While all of this is going on, Jesus’ face turns a bright white, and he’s radiating light from within. This isn’t the sun or some other outside source of light reflecting off of Jesus, this is Jesus shining light from within Himself. **Visible proof that he is indeed “The Light of the World.”** Up to this point, Jesus had appeared just like any other man. Isaiah had told us that the messiah’s appearance would **“have no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2b)** Yet here, he’s glowing this bright white from within. It’s pretty clear who Jesus is.

The Old Testament scriptures are often described as **“The Law and the Prophets”** by Jesus himself in the New Testament. Here on the mountaintop, we see them represented. Moses, you may recall, was the one who led the people of Israel out of Egypt. After they left Egypt, Moses made his own trip up a mountain, in this case, Mt. Sinai, and it was there that God gave Moses and the people of Israel the 10 commandments, the Law. Elijah was the personification of the Prophets. His presence on that mountain represented the Prophets and their writings of the Old Testament. **So, we have Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, representing the Prophets, and they’re on this mountain, talking with Jesus? And what exactly are they talking about?**

Luke’s account of the Transfiguration gives us the answer: **“And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:30-31)** His departure at Jerusalem. **Notice they’re not talking about Jesus’ glorious appearance, they’re not talking about how they’re equal, they’re talking about Jesus’ upcoming journey to Jerusalem, the way that Jesus would become the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.** This is pretty important, because this journey to Jerusalem was the very topic of discussion among Jesus and his disciples just a few days earlier.

If you back up a chapter in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus asked his disciples who they thought He was, and it was Peter who was bold to proclaim, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)** But just a few verses later, **Jesus then tells them why he had come. He told them he’d have to go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and rise again.** What was Peter’s response to this? **“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (v. 23)** Peter essentially told Jesus **“not if I have anything to say about it. Jesus, I’m not going to let that happen to you, you’re not going to go to Jerusalem, or suffer, or die. I won’t let that happen!”** Do you remember what Jesus said to him? **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (v. 23)** Jesus was quick to tell him, **“It’s not about the things of the world, Peter. You missed the point, you’re not listening to me!”** Peter was so preoccupied with glory the way the world sees it, that he lost his focus on the things of God, which were revealed to him through the Word.

As Peter sees this great sight on the Mount of Transfiguration, he can’t help but be excited. It’s his “mountaintop experience”. It’s got all the bells and whistles the world looks for in an experience that seems to be from God. Peter wants to keep ahold of it as long as he can. He says **“Lord, it’s good for us to be here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (v. 4)** Peter wants this experience to last, he’s going by what his eyes see, not what his ears are hearing. He’s back to his old way of thinking. He wants this visual glory to last.

Then a cloud approaches the mountain and overshadows them. A voice comes from this cloud, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”** (v. 5). You may recall a few weeks ago when we had Jesus’ baptism as our Gospel reading, that a cloud came, and the Father said **“This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”** Now, just as Peter is all wrapped up in the glorious appearance of the Transfiguration, before he can decide this must be what Jesus was destined to do, he hears God the Father Himself say **“Listen to Him!”**

How many times do we get wrapped up in outward appearances? Maybe you went to a church and you didn’t like the music, or the Pastor didn’t do what you expected or dress the way you wanted him to? There are many within the Christian church who claim you need to have a **“mountaintop experience”** in order to find God. Yet, what happened in our reading for today? Did God the Father say **“This is my beloved Son, climb this mountain, and do these things, and you’ll see this vision too?”** No, the Father said **“Listen to Him.”**

When this miraculous event was over did Jesus disappear? No, he was right there. He didn’t disappear. His Word didn’t disappear. The disciples left that mountain with a simple command, **“listen to Him”**.

We don’t live by sight, we live by faith. You come here week after week to do what God the Father told Peter, James, and John to do, **“listen to him.”** Through the scriptures, we hear what our Lord has to say about himself, and what He did for us. It may not be glamorous in the eyes of the world, but through the preaching of the Word, God is bringing you to faith in Christ, or strengthening your faith in Christ. Our God who promises you **“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:20)

Peter didn’t get the point of the transfiguration that day, but in our Epistle reading, he wrote about that day on the mountain. **“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place . . . For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”** (2 Peter 1:16-21) Peter realized that his experience on that mountain top didn’t bring him any closer to God than anyone else, but that command **“listen to Him”** was fulfilled in paying attention to the Word.

On Wednesday evening, we will be moving into the season of Lent as we gather for Ash Wednesday. On that day, and throughout the season, we will hear of the journey to Jerusalem that Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah on that mountain in our text for today. We will be hearing, finally, from the silent witnesses of Jesus Passion.

We will be reminded of the wages of our sin, and our need for a Savior. During the season of Lent, and always, I want to highly encourage each and every one of you to continue to come to the Lord’s house, and listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, when you have that little black cross drawn on your forehead tell you **“remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** Listen to Jesus speak from the cross. Listen to Jesus suffer, die, and rise again for you. Listen to Jesus. Not just today, not just during Lent, but always. Because when we listen to Jesus, we know we’re experiencing something that no mountaintop or other experience in the world can ever offer. Amen.