

Luke 9:28-36

²⁸About eight days after he said these words, Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹While he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰Just then, two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him! ³¹They appeared in glory and were talking about his departure, which he was going to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.

³²Peter and those with him were weighed down with sleep, but when they were completely awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

³³As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let’s make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not realize what he was saying.

³⁴While he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They were afraid as they went into the cloud. ³⁵Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” ³⁶After the voice had spoken, they found Jesus alone. They kept this secret and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

Mountaintop Lessons

I.

Escape. Sometimes you just need to get away from the events of the day.

Sure, there might be beautiful scenery, and you appreciate that. There might be fabulous things to experience, and those are great. Some like nothing better than to just sit still for a few days and soak up the sun; others like to immerse themselves in culture; still others seek a rush of adrenaline, doing things that are completely different from everyday life. Whatever your taste, you probably want something different for your vacation than whatever it is you do and see on a daily basis.

It’s Christian education week. Even students at our Lutheran Elementary School like vacations. They just want an escape from school and homework and the daily routine. Parents don’t mind, either—not having to hound their children to get homework done, or tell them to hurry up and get their things because it’s time to leave in the morning.

Vacation is special. No matter what the age, we look forward to it.

“About eight days after he said these words, Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray” (Luke 9:28, EHV). What did they need to escape? What had caused so much stress in their lives?

At the beginning of this chapter Luke records: “Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. ²He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:1-2, EHV). They went on their mission, and then returned. There was some excitement at the conclusion of their mission, but undoubtedly they experienced some opposition, too. Jesus had told them as he sent them out: “If they do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them” (Luke 9:5, EHV).

Later in the same chapter Jesus fed the 5,000. That event happened at a time Jesus was seeking some private time with the disciples. Instead, the disciples witnessed a miracle as they served bread and fish to many, and picked up the pieces left over.

Finally there was a little alone time for Jesus and the disciples. Jesus asked them who they believed him to be. Peter, the spokesman for the group, answered for all: “The Christ of God” (Luke 9:20, EHV). Immediately after Peter’s answer, Jesus said some disturbing

things. “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law. He must be killed and be raised on the third day” (Luke 9:22, EHV).

After the highs of healing the sick and driving out demons as the disciples spoke about the kingdom of God, and the lows of having to walk out of some towns when they were rejected, and some more highs of experiencing the unmistakably miraculous power of Jesus as he fed the multitudes with a bag lunch, this roller coaster was getting to be a bumpy ride.

Confusion.

What were they to think? What were they to feel? The things Jesus told them were distinctly uncomfortable.

II.

They had no idea. Things were going to get worse. Far worse. Jesus hadn’t been using hyperbole when he said he was going to suffer and die and rise again. If they *thought* their emotions had been in turmoil throughout the events of the last few days and weeks, they would soon find out what that *really* meant.

After announcing his impending death, Jesus had said to them: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, EHV). They didn’t know that the death Jesus would face would be on the cross; they just knew they didn’t want to even consider the possibility that Jesus would die. As for them taking up their own crosses, they didn’t really understand that, yet, either. They would learn.

They needed a vacation. Up the mountain Jesus led them for a relaxing prayer session.

“While he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰Just then, two men, Moses and Elijah, were talking with him!” (Luke 9:29-30, EHV).

Now *this* was more like it! They understood that Jesus was the Messiah. *This* was what they had dreamed of. *This* was the kind of glory Jesus deserved. Moses and Elijah there? Clothes a dazzling white color? Jesus’ face changed, and was glowing, too?

“Peter and those with him were weighed down with sleep” (Luke 9:32, EHV). I can imagine that Peter, James, and John were completely relaxed by the events of this vacation. What a relief it was not to have all the ups and downs of the past days and weeks!

“When they were completely awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.” (Luke 9:32, EHV). What a relief to see Jesus in the glory they knew was his due.

“Peter said to him, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here. Let’s make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’” (Luke 9:33, EHV). Have you ever had a vacation you just didn’t want to end? Probably. The place is just so perfect. The activities so wonderful. You probably posted pictures on social media. You gushed about the experience. Maybe you even thought it would be a good idea to move there.

“[Peter] did not realize what he was saying” (Luke 9:33, EHV). If you stayed at your favorite vacation spot forever, it just wouldn’t be the same. People who live there take vacations, too, and they go someplace else to experience some other thing. If you lived there, it wouldn’t be an endless vacation.

It isn’t just Peter or his companions who get bedazzled by Jesus’ transfiguration. The good in Jesus’ transfiguration is plain for all to see. There it is, pure as light. Jesus is God.

If you want to stay up there on the mountaintop with Peter, James, and John, and with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, you are missing the big picture, just as Peter and his companions did.

III.

“While [Peter] was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. They were afraid as they went into the cloud. ³⁵Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’ ³⁶After the voice had spoken, they found Jesus alone” (Luke 9:34-36, EHV).

Vacation doesn’t last forever. Jesus knew what was coming. He knew the disciples faced some very difficult days. He, Jesus, faced the most difficult days of all. What was coming was far more glorious than this momentary experience on the mountaintop. But it wouldn’t *look* more glorious; it would look horrific. What he would face *was* horrific.

Maybe Peter, James, and John didn’t hear what Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah. Maybe they just chose to ignore it, because it didn’t fit in with their ideals. When the two icons of the Old Testament appeared: “They appeared in glory and were talking about his departure, which he was going to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31, EHV). Maybe it seemed vague to them; after all, even after Jesus rose from the dead, they still were slow to catch on.

Think of what a disaster it would have been if Jesus had listened to Peter and stayed on the mountaintop! There was work to be done; the most important work ever.

IV.

“Master, it is good for us to be here” (Luke 9:33, EHV). It is good for us to be here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, today. It is good to make the most of every opportunity in the classroom and in the worship service to be reminded of God’s great love for us carried out by Jesus for all.

Throughout the church year we experience the changes of the seasons. The hymns and readings reflect the changes. Some of the liturgies also reflect the mood of the changing season.

Today we are using Morning Praise, New Service Settings for our service. It is definitely an upbeat and happy service. It fits well with the excitement of Jesus’ glory displayed on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is good for us to be here.

There was a dazzling display of glory. The Heavenly Father spoke from the heavens and acknowledged yet again that Jesus was his Son, whom he loves. Moses and Elijah were there to speak with Jesus about what was to come.

This coming week we will begin the season of Lent. The mood will become more somber. The alleluias will take a vacation for the season of lent. The hymns will be different and more solemn.

It will be a time of reflection. Our sins are the reason Jesus came. The display of glory on the Mount of Transfiguration wasn’t the be-all to end-all of his glory. It was great, but there is an even greater glory on an even more important mountain.

Mount Calvary won’t look nearly as appealing or as glorious with its trio of crosses and Roman soldiers standing there, mocking those who hung on them. But in reality, its glory is even greater. On Mount Calvary Jesus’ glory is displayed in full as he refuses to come down from the cross, which would have compromised his work of paying for the sins of the world. His glory is displayed even more fully as he begs forgiveness for his enemies. His glory is displayed to the fullest as he completes his work and cries out: “It is finished.”

Yes, it is good for us to be here. It is good to be reminded that our Savior had the resolve to come down from the Mount of Transfiguration knowing full well that he would ascend the mount of suffering. Thank God for our lessons from the mountaintop. Amen.