

WEDNESDAY – February 18th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: May I remember mountaintops...in times of trouble.

Holy One, when I come to you today, help me to remember what you have had for me in the wondrous times. Let those memories sustain me when the times are not so wondrous. Be with me today in joy and in pain, on the mountaintop or in the valley. Thank you for this time together so that all these experiences are a part of our relationship. In your gracious name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:2-5

KEY VERSE: Mark 9:5:

“Teacher, this is wonderful!” Peter exclaimed. “We will make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” (NLT).

We have come to the mountaintop with Jesus and his faithful followers. Well, at least they try to be his faithful followers. Jesus knows in a short while they will fall away and deny him. Now they are on the mountaintop but the valley of the shadow of death is right around the corner. How many times have we been to the mountaintop, if not literally, then figuratively? Our spiritual journey has many such experiences. It seems like every time we have such an experience it is followed by some tragic difficulty. Perhaps, we should be wary of such mountaintop experiences, if they herald the valleys of despair! On the other hand, we can take these wondrous experiences and use them to sustain us through the troubles of life which invariably come our way, if not immediately following the mountaintops.

Have you ever sat and wondered just why Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountaintop for what we call the transfiguration? I have. Did they need to see Christ in all his glory before the crucifixion? Did they need the reminder that he superseded Moses and Elijah? Was he just showing off for them? OK, I never really entertained that idea! But, seriously, why did they go to the mountaintop at all? It was a terrifying experience, yet it was also wonderful. Peter wanted to stay there awhile and take it all in. I know the feeling. I have often been on wonderful retreats where some special epiphany experience took place and I never wanted to leave that atmosphere and return to the “real” world. I’ll bet some of you have had a similar experience. We can really identify with Peter. Let’s build a shrine and stay here and worship! Unfortunately, life isn’t like that. Even if we stayed at the retreat center or other place where a mountaintop experience takes place the “real” world would still intrude. Our lives are not meant to stay in some ethereal plain, away from the circumstances of the world. Even those who enter convents and monasteries are confronted with the rest of the world and have to deal with them in some form. Our call to service in the world and to be witnesses for the Christ cannot be done in some isolated place. There is value in being sequestered from the pain and difficulties of life for a short time. But the experiences we have during that time are to be used in the rest of life, not squirreled away so that we are the only ones to benefit from them.

Often when we have our mountaintop experiences we gain strength for life’s journey. It’s a little like the strength we receive when we “wait upon the Lord” as we explored on February 8th. Such special times with the Lord renew our strength and our faith receives a breath of fresh air from the Holy Spirit. In the mountaintop experience of Peter, James and John, they experiences a glimpse of the full glory of Christ. It was an awesome experience and they didn’t quite know how to respond. In the verse following today’s reading (which we may touch upon again later) [Peter] *“did not know what to say, for they were terrified.”* They

knew it was a good thing that had happened but what to do with the experience was beyond them. Since we don't know how to interpret our mountaintop experiences and we don't want to lose them we usually want to just stay put. But, like David in Psalm 23, we know that the Lord is with us even when we walk through the valley of death or any other valleys of despair where hope seems far away and God's presence seems hidden. Christ's glory bathed the disciples in radiant light and if they didn't understand who Jesus was before this experience, there was now no doubt at all. It didn't keep them from running away when Jesus was arrested and even denying him at the trial. But, after the resurrection, it would return to them in full force. Perhaps their memory of that time was blurred until the resurrection, but afterwards there would be no denying its power. I don't know about you, but I want to remember all my mountaintop experiences so that when the trials come I have their strength to draw upon. Christ's glory and light are powerful blessings to me. I have a great desire to bathe in that light and to reflect it over and over again. Join me on the mountaintop and let us sustain one another through the valleys.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:28-31

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What have been some of my mountaintop experiences along my faith journey?
2. How have I received them and what did I do with them?
3. How can I use my mountaintop experiences to get through the valleys of despair?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Plan to go on a retreat, either a personal spiritual retreat or one with a group of other believers. Find the place and the time which fits you best and get it scheduled now, even if it will be months until you can go.
2. List some of your mountaintop experiences and what you learned from them.

Radiant Savior, stay with me throughout this day. Bring to my memory the mountaintop experiences which have shaped my life. Show me how to use those experiences when I walk through the valleys of despair. Continue to bathe me in your wondrous light as I walk along the road. May the discoveries of this Epiphany season continue to mature as I continue to walk along the road of discipleship. In your glorious name, I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY – February 19th

CENTERING BREATH PRAYER: How shall I...face my losses?

Dearest Lord, walk with me today as we meet once more. As Elisha stayed with Elijah, I seek your presence along the road. Teach me as we go along so that I will be ready to meet the circumstances of my life. Show me the way to minimize the losses of my life by holding onto the Savior at all times. In your sustaining name, I pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 2:1-5

KEY VERSE: 2 Kings 2:5

“The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, ‘Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?’ ‘Yes, I know,’ he replied, ‘but do not speak of it’” (NIV).

Have you ever had your best friend move away or even worse, die? You know the friend I'm talking about, the one you spent hours with just being silly, or the one who supported you during your worst defeats in life, or the one who encouraged you to become the very best you could be. If you ever lost such a friend, even for a relatively short time, the loss was devastating. In today's scripture passage, Elisha is about to lose his best friend and his mentor, Elijah. They both know that Elijah is about to be taken from the world. Elisha won't be able to call Elijah on the phone to ask his advice, or send him an e-mail when he is down. Elisha is going to be on his own. Now, Elijah wants to spare his young friend some grief and tries several times to leave Elisha behind, but Elisha is having none of it. He wants to soak up everything he can before Elijah is gone and he wants to spend every moment he can with his friend. So, when Elijah tries to leave him behind, he just continues walking down the road beside him.

Now, I don't know about you, but I had never noticed the reference to companies of prophets in various places before. I sort of always thought that the Lord chose one or two prophets at a time, like Elijah and Elisha, etc. But, apparently there were many prophets at times, even though we don't hear a lot about them. Within our passage today we find two different groups of prophets pulling Elisha aside to remind him that the Lord is about to take Elijah away. Both times Elisha tells them, “Yes, he knows, but be silent, don't talk about it.” Elisha wants to spend the time with Elijah as normally as he is able, without constant reminders of the inevitable. He knows it will happen, but until it does, leave them alone. Elisha is choosing to face his loss with dignity, quietly, patiently, but walking beside his friend for as long as possible.

What can we learn from this? Even if we have never faced such a devastating loss, we can imagine what it would be like. How might we face it? Could we just walk calmly along knowing that at any moment our best friend and mentor could be taken away from us? I know I would have a difficult time with this. Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. They just didn't listen very well and when the time came they deserted him, unlike Elisha with Elijah. I think sometimes, I am a lot more like the disciples who ran away than I am like Elisha. I wish I could say otherwise. I think Elisha was a lot more steadfast as a friend than I often am. Perhaps, that is the lesson we can take away from this scripture passage – be steadfast and true to our friends. It's a good lesson, though it may not be the only lesson. I think it is more about facing our losses with dignity, quietly and patiently, without a lot of fuss. Of course, in order to do this, we need to cultivate dignity, quiet and patience within ourselves before such a loss comes to pass. It doesn't come naturally. Such attitudes need practice so

that they become a natural part of ourselves. Most of us probably need a lot of help from the Savior to find these attitudes growing within. Perhaps this is a part of the process of the renewing of our minds which leads to transformation of which Paul speaks in Romans 12:2. I think there is more to this lesson which will come to us in the later part of the scripture passage when Elijah is called to the Lord and the passage of his mantle to Elisha. But, more on this later. For today, let us see the love which Elisha bears Elijah and the companionship they share before the loss takes place. I would gladly encounter such a love and have friends who would be content to walk beside me in the face of imminent loss. I would wish to be counted as such a friend for another. The good news is that Jesus is such a friend and will accompany us at all times. What better companion could we ask for when life throws its worst at us?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES: Romans 12:1-3

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND/OR JOURNALING:

1. What kind of friend am I when life becomes hard?
2. How do I face the losses life throws my way?
3. How can I prepare for the losses that will come?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION:

1. Spend some quality time with a true friend. If your best friend is not near, take some time and give him or her a call and share your life with him or her once more.
2. Cultivate a new friendship, one which could blossom into something special.
3. Pray for a mentor who has helped shape your spiritual journey. If possible, let him or her know just how special he or she has been for you.

Jesus, you have called me your friend and you always are with me. How can I possibly say thanks your for such a precious gift? Your presence sustains me when life gets me down or takes away the ones who have been precious to me. When I would be overwhelmed by the losses that come, be my guardian and my comforter. In your sustaining name, I pray. Amen.