

### **Exodus 24:12-18**

<sup>12</sup>The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup>So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup>To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them."

<sup>15</sup>Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup>The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup>Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup>Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

### **Matthew 17:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>3</sup>Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. <sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup>And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

### **Sermon**

When I was a kid, I loved going to camp. I went every summer for at least a week, starting in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. By the time I was in high school, I volunteered for as many weeks as they would let me, just so I could be there for more time. And I loved it for all the reasons so many of us love camp: crafts and games and campfire stories and illicit, late night swimming and meaningful conversations and hiking and beautiful scenery and new friends and old friends and fun older counselors and high ropes courses and mud day and all the rest. And it wasn't just camp. I also loved the weeks I got to spend as a high school student

with my youth group doing service projects, both in Mexico and on the Washington coast. I get a similar warm, fuzzy feeling of connection and excitement from our Sierra Service Project trip here at Emmanuel. There's something about spending really connected, intentional time with other people, in service to a shared set of values, that I love. They're some of my best memories and most anticipated adventures.

This isn't surprising. In fact, in youth ministry land we like to call these sorts of experiences "mountain top moments." If I'm being fancy and talking to and about adults, rather than high schoolers, I might use the more erudite phrase "thin place." But it really means the same thing: those moments and experiences in our lives when we have felt profoundly close to God and to the community of others around us. And this isn't just Christian. The real keys are intentional time with other people, like, oh, I don't know...sleeping on a hard gym floor and undertaking a complicated construction project. And doing all of it for a shared reason. I would imagine that completely nonreligious people may have this feeling about Habitat for Humanity or a trip to aid in earthquake relief or clean up from Hurricanes or whatever. Shared values and a pressure cooker of community connection can create spaces where we feel loved, appreciated, and deeply connected to one another. Mountain tops or thin places or just "remember that time, it was great, I wish I could go back there."

In a sense, the Transfiguration is sort of the Bible's ultimate mountain top experience. Literally. Also, Moses getting the commandments from God. In both cases there's this beautiful scene of communion. Where people, those living and those long since past, Moses and Elijah and Jesus and Peter and the others, they're all there. And so is God's presence. Just for a moment, on that mountain, there's something of contentment. Of being present with one another and with God. The communion of the divine and the human, shared in a single moment of point of time and space.

And then Peter goes and does what all of us do: he tries to make it stick. Like, Let me build you a house, Jesus, and then we can all just stay for a while.

I totally tried to do this with camp, and with my service trips, and even today in those spaces where the work and the community feel meaningful. I know I can never stretch it out, but it doesn't stop me from wanting to hold on for a little longer.

I know I do this, and I suspect Peter was trying, and many of you all probably have felt this way, because it's a way of saying—I just want to be this version of myself a little bit longer. I just want to stay here, in the warm comfort of the friends I've made, doing meaningful work, having good conversations, thinking about what matters most to us, staying up late at night talking, enjoying work and play, just a little bit longer. In these mountain top moments I feel more myself than I often do in the day to day. I'm sure Peter felt that way, basking in the glow of his religious heroes, up on Mount Tabor. And so we try to make it last.

But, of course, camp and the Transfiguration both come to an end.

There's something pragmatic about it, of course. It takes a lot of energy and money and time to put on camp or a service project. We take time away from work, and someone else cooks our meals and honestly, it's a terrible idea for anyone over the age of 15 to sleep for more than a week on the hard gym floor or the questionable camp bunk. And, even if it were to stretch out, we'd start to get annoyed with all the weird habits of our new friends, in the same way we get annoyed with the weird habits of our spouse and kids and regular friends. If Jesus and Peter and the guys just hung out on the mountain for the rest of their earthly lives, we wouldn't be here today. Jesus knows that the moment is lovely, but it can't last. You have to get on with living.

But.

There's also not a rule that says the regular world has to keep on working the way it's working. The Transfiguration isn't just some nice story of Jesus and some pals having a tea party. It's right there in the name...the story is supposed to transfigure Jesus, and the disciples, and by extension, us. It's a mountain top experience, it can't last, but it should change us. We're supposed to take these moments where we feel most ourselves, free to live fully as the people God created us to be, because we're surrounded by people who love us as we are and work that is meaningful and good...and then we should take that change and go out into the world and live as if it matters, as if we have been actually changed.

My high school youth director once wryly commented to me that he'd never tire of taking hundreds of high school students to the poorest corner of the Tijuana dump, hearing all of us talk a big game about how the poverty had changed us, only to come home, order \$75 worth of pizza, and then sit around with our friends talking about the impact of poverty on our nascent little youthful souls. With not an ounce of recognition for that \$75 pizza bill.

He knew the truth. Change is hard, and it doesn't happen passively. We have to actually commit to the work. Peter saw Jesus on that mountain, filled with the very light of God, and yet just a few days later, he turns right around and denies Christ three times. But then a few days after that he turns back around and asks for forgiveness, which Jesus offers. Change isn't a straight line, and it's never easy. It requires reflection and intention and work and mistakes and apologies and trying again and staying committed and all that. But if it's a transfiguration born of God, then in the end, it's going to be worth it.

Not so we can live on the top of the mountain, but so we can go out into the world as people transfigured by the belief that we are loved by God, we are loved by others, and we have been invited into good, meaningful work and play in this world, and that by participating in it, we can bring God's kingdom just a little closer. We can make the air just a little bit thinner.

This, for me, is the hope of the Transfiguration. Not that we stay put, but that we're invited into something that can change us, and if it can change us, then it can change the world.