

“Extol the Lord our God, and
worship at God’s holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy.”

Holy mountains and holy smoke!

What a moment it must have been
for these few disciples!

They knew Jesus went up into the mountains to pray,
but this time he invited them to join him
on a private hike to the top of
Mt. Tabor to pray.

Then it happened!

Moses and Elijah appeared and Jesus engaged
them in conversation.

We don’t know anything except that
they talked about Jesus’ exodus that was going
to be accomplished in Jerusalem.

Our translations say “departure,” but
the word in the Greek means exodus.

So not only was it a moment for the disciples
but what a moment for Jesus!

We can assume the will of God was presented to him.

The three disciples were weighed down with sleep,
but suddenly became fully alert and
the Bible tells us they saw Jesus' glory.

Savior (Jesus,)
Moses, (law and commandments),
and Elijah (prophets).

What a mountain top experience
they had in that holy space.

But, like all mountain top experiences
it had to come to an end.

We want them to last but they never do.

They had to come back to the real world.

Back to the ordinary grind and
the mundane day to day.

They had to come back to the world where
there is suffering and set-backs;
trials and errors;
illness and death.

In fact, the part we didn't read today
revealed the kind of sufferings they needed
to return to... sick and hurting people.

It's not too much of a stretch to know
that they'd all have preferred to stay up
on that mountain - I know I would have.

Wouldn't you?

Holy mountains and holy smoke...

How do we react when we must go
through the valleys of life and death?

If you live long enough you will
encounter a loved one that dies,

you will walk with someone you love
during illness,

you'll suffer your own maladies and
experience separations.

In those moments of depression or illness,
with problems at work or isolations in
our social life, we find that
they're all significant, even the small ones!

On top of that mountain, that day,
an extraordinary event took place.

Instead of trying to make sense of
what happened on that mountain top,
amidst the smoke and lightning,
we stand in awe of its significance.

We know that something happens on the walk up,
something occurs in the prayer at the top, and
something is present on the walk down.

Not one thing we experience is insignificant.

It all matters.

The thing is,
we still wish we could exchange
our valleys for different ones.

How many of us are like the young mother
who must wrangles three unruly toddlers,

who when asked if she had to do it all over again,
would she have the children?

She answers, “Yes, just not the same ones!” :-)

Don't we all feel that way? (Pause)

You see, being here, being alive, is not always
a mountain top experience.

It's not supposed to be and truthfully, even
being on the mountain with Jesus was
not always a mountain top
experience anyway.

The text said, "a cloud came and overshadowed them;
and they were terrified as they entered the cloud."

You see, there's a fear here
that we need to talk about.

A terror that occurs when humans find
themselves in the presence of God.

The event of the Transfiguration was both
awe striking and terrifying. (Pause)

It's interesting to note, I think, that
earlier in Luke when we read about
the Holy Spirit overshadowing someone it
was Mary being made pregnant
with the Son of God.

Then, later in Luke, we will read about the disciples
not being able to stay awake while Jesus

prayed on another mountain,
the Mount of Olives.

They were weighed down with grief there, too.

You'll recall Jesus prayed for the cup to be
taken from him, but said,
“not my will but yours be done.”

Transfiguration ties these two events together.

Mary's willingness, the disciples willingness,
and Jesus' willingness to do the will of God.

I'd bet none of them fully understood
what that meant at the time, but
they were awestruck by the presence of God
and even terrifying.

It's important for us to know that we don't need
to fully understand what happened on
Mt. Tabor, either.

We just need to hear God's words
commanding us to “listen to Jesus.”

When we listen to Jesus and follow
the will of the Holy Spirit,

we will know that our life is
headed somewhere meaningful.

Even when we don't know all the facts, or
how serious a problem might be.

When we don't even know the difference
between the beginning and the end,
we can simply listen to Jesus.

If we live into the will of God, good or bad,
sickness or health, sorrow or joy
will come to us but they'll never overcome us.
(Pause)

After lunch today in the
Emory Hingst Fellowship Hall,

we will gather back here for our
Mardi Gras Talent Show.

There'll be singing, dancing, and laughter.

Some might look at the current state of our nation,
and its leaders, and question if this is
a good time for us to be having such
a "show" like this, together.

To witness what occurred in the Oval Office last week,

and the potential decision to side with Russia
and its dictator over Ukraine and

her president working to pursue democracy
in their land is more than disturbing;

it's a total abandonment of our nation's values.

More than ever we must use our voices
to call our leaders to listen to Jesus.

It crossed my mind that this may
not be the right time for a Mardi Gras.

But, then I remembered the way Mark told
the story of what Jesus and his disciples did
after he shared communion with them,
it was just before his arrest.

Chapter 14:23 reads,
“When they had sung a hymn,
they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Jesus could sing because he knew his strength
and power came from His God,
in His life.

It brought what was most important into sight.

The peace that surpasses all understanding
will do the same for us. (Pause)

So we will not let our joy be taken away.

We will sing, dance, laugh even though
our trials are not over.

We aren't afraid.

For God is present on the mountain top and
in the valley below.

We sing songs of salvation and hope,
songs of love and peace.

We sing, Hallelujah!

The song goes on as we make this our
mountain top experience
no matter what valley we may be in!

AMEN!