

Each one of us is called to have a relationship with him, sometimes we experience the highs, but we also at times find ourselves in the valley of the lows, where even if we ourselves are not experiencing it we find ourselves amidst the human condition challenged with the needs of those around us to offer love and compassion. Mountain top experiences are wonderful, but living, working, helping and loving in the valleys is where Jesus calls us to be.

The writer of book of Hebrews tells us that our faith, our walk on this earth, is much like running a race, that the race is more of a marathon than a sprint, that we are in it for the long haul and that perseverance is required to reach the end. There are times when the wind is at our back, when we are running well. But there are other times when we stumble and fall, when things... experiences and troubles get to us, times when we grow tired and don't feel like running at all. It's then as I shared in last week's sermon that we need to fix our eyes upon Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith, to remember his valley experience and the glory of the resurrection that followed.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews goes on to tell us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who are cheering us on. I wonder who is in that crowd, for you today watching you, willing you to keep going?

They will of course include the disciples.... people who through the ages have been faithful. They include those who have worshipped her, people whose lives have been touched by God and moved to share that love with others.... Those who have finished the race, they include our loved ones who in the faith of Christ have gone before us and wait for us to finish our race.... They aren't judging us when we don't quite make it because they too know how difficult the race can be, has been is being....

I wonder how will we finish the race of life.

If we have seen the face of the Pilot, and know that all is well?

If we are able to give our all for him, to him... for we only have one race to run And that's the challenge for us all this morning as disciples of Jesus.... to truly give our all, knowing that as we cross that finish line of life, we know that we had no more to give.

To fight the good fight, to finish the race, and finish it well, so that as we look into the face of our pilot Jesus, we may truly know that all is well and receive that great reward for our faith, the crown of life.

Amen.

Sermon St. Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown

3.3.19 Sunday before Lent Luke 9:28-36

Holding on...

A husband and wife were sitting around the table talking one night. "Why don't you play golf with George anymore?" she said, "Would you play with a fellow who puts down the wrong score and moves the ball when you aren't watching and cheats on almost every hole?" "No," she replied, "I would not." "He answered, "Neither will George!"

There are lots of people today that are not what they seem to be.

Would any of you know Archibald Leach, but you would know Cary Grant

What about Issur Danielovitch Densky - Never heard of him? But you would most definitely know...Kirk Douglas.

And this one I'm sure you know.... Marion Morrison, well he became John Wayne.

Things are not always what they appear to be...

A ship was in a serious storm and in grave distress. The passengers were alarmed, until one of them finally, against orders, went up to the deck and made his way to the pilothouse. The pilot was at the wheel, but seeing the man was greatly frightened gave him a reassuring smile. Returning to the other passengers the man said, "I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled and so all must be well."

Those words could be the phrase on which the story of the transfiguration is based.

Jesus has taken Peter, James and John to the top of the mountain, and there he is changed, he is transfigured into a white glow that could never be duplicated on earth.

We read in Genesis that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and that Adam and Eve were the culmination of his creation.

Were told that Adam and Eve met with God in person but that after they sinned, when "they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from his presence and because of their disobedience of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil God banished them from his presence.

But as we continue with the story we see that periodically God chose to reveal his presence and that this was known as "the Shekinah glory. In the book of Exodus, we read that the people of Israel first saw the Shekinah glory after they left Egypt, that the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.

Moses however wanted more.... he wanted to see the face of God.

But we read that God said, to him "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" but it appears that God wanted Moses to see more than anyone else had.... because he said to him "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:21-23). Following this experience Moses wrote down the 10 commandments but when he came down from Mount Sinai, he had to wear a veil over his face as his face shone so brightly because, having been in the presence of God, he reflected his glory.

During the dedication service for the temple, Solomon prayed, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). But we read that as soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house and there the glory remained....

But 400 hundred years in Ezekiel 8 the priest of the lord having turned away from God to other gods, the presence of the Lord left the temple and was not see again...

Until that is when Jesus came.... and on top of the mountain Jesus takes with him two of his disciples and as he is standing before them he is transfigured, he is changed. His clothes become as white as can be and his face shines...and along with this glow comes two people out of history, Elijah and Moses.

The Three disciples didn't know what to do, of course.... but impulsive Peter says, "Let us build three booths, or three monuments to this great occasion.

Let us stay here and relish in the moment...but then a voice says to them, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

And then it's all gone...

I wonder if you've ever had an experience of God that you wanted to hold onto, but as quick as it came it was went.... but have held onto that experience as if your life depended upon it... If like Peter, James and John you have thought to yourself 'I have seen the face of the pilot, he smiled and so all must be well'.

The 2 disciples had seen the glory of God through Jesus, Moses and Elijah, they had heard the voice of God as he spoke on the mountain, and I imagine that they thought they could take on the world, that there was no storm they couldn't face. How wrong they were....Perhaps like me, you too have had an experience, which made you feel able to take on the world....

In April 1968 Martin Luther King preached a sermon entitled, "I see the Promised Land."

King said that he had peace that he didn't worry about anything, because he had been to the mountaintop with God.

He had no fear of the world, for he said, "My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

The next day, however Martin Luther King, was shot and died...But that night when he preached, that he was ready to face his destiny. He was ready to face the future because he had seen the face of the Pilot... and all was well.

The mountain top experience for the three disciples was out of this world, it was amazing and glorious and they wanted to stay...they wanted take in all that they had seen, all that they had heard after all who wouldn't...

At times we too want that same mountain top experience in our faith.

We want that glorious feeling of being with God.... feeling that there's nothing that can come against us...we love, crave, even demand the highs...but all to often despise, reject and shun the lows....and when they come we wonder where God is...has he left us...has he forgotten us?

Maybe at times we recognise that our lives or the lives of those around us are not always glorious, and that maybe there's something wrong with our faith. But it appears that Jesus did not see it that way.... because after the experience on the mountaintop what did Jesus do?

He set his face toward Jerusalem... toward the Cross-

Jesus understood the need for the mountaintop, but he also knew that the real work was in the valleys, that the real work was in the depth of the human condition of sin along with all of its brokenness, pain and distress. On that hill called Calvary, Jesus felt and experienced the human condition in all of its brutality...all its fear.... all its hatred, and in those hours knew the depth of suffering, of human suffering, of our suffering.

He knew the anguish, the loneliness, the sense of complete separation; the despair that life sometimes makes us feel. He knew and felt it all on the cross. Yet, through the Resurrection, he conquered it all....

Jesus went to the mountain to be transfigured, but he came down the mountain to be a Saviour.