

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on February 11, 2018 at Victory of the Lamb on Mark 9:2-9.

### **“How Good To Be Together....with Jesus!”**



I don't know about you but I've sure had some amazing experiences here the last couple years. For example, Christmas Eve this past year was amazing, wasn't it? {pic} To fit all the people for our afternoon service we pulled into the sanctuary every chair we had in the whole building including the office furniture! What a moving candlelight experience that was singing O Holy Night with our church family! And I

can think of so many similarly wonderful experiences. There was our dedication service two years ago when we celebrated all that God had done in building this ministry center. There was our farewell to our friends from the Builders for Christ where we jammed out and sang songs in this yet unfinished sanctuary space. And over a decade of ministry here in Franklin there have been soccer camps and 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades and Hallepaloozas in the park. We've worshiped together at a movie theater and met in a beer hall. And of course there have been countless legendary experiences provided free of charge by the Victory Café {pic}!



There have been so many amazing experiences here where I've felt so incredibly blessed. Experiences where I have said, like in the song we just sang, "How good, Lord, to be here!" Have you ever had experiences in life that were like that? Experiences that were so moving or so meaningful that you didn't want them to ever end, moments that you wanted to last forever because they were so good or so glorious? It's a powerful feeling, isn't it? It's what Jesus' disciples experienced too...

**<sup>2</sup> After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.**

**<sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)**

**<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"**

So they were having what we might call a mountaintop experience. A spiritual high point. They got to see a sustained glimpse of Jesus' shining glory as the Son of God. His everyday appearance as an ordinary human person like them was transfigured to reveal his hidden glory as the holy, almighty 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity who as true God has existed from all eternity. Sure, the disciples got glimpses of this from time to time; as often as Jesus performed a miracle they saw evidence pointing to his divine nature. But this was a stunning, multisensory experience! And as all of a sudden Elijah and Moses from Old Testament times joined them, they experienced a sustained glimpse of what the glory of heaven will be like where we will be together will those people of faith from every generation who've trusted in their Savior. We will be together in the glorious presence of God our Savior himself!

Sometimes because God is so good, we have mountaintop experiences sort of like that too right here, don't we? Maybe not in the same way that Peter, James and John experienced it that day on the mountain. But when we're here together in the Lord's house for worship and we hear the message of the gospel and we are overwhelmed by God's grace. There is a hidden glory revealed through God's word and sacraments, isn't there? Through ordinary human messengers like me and through simply ordinary means, God opens our eyes to see who Jesus really is—that he's not just a mere mortal human being destined to die like us but he's the eternal Son of God—our Savior who won a decisive victory over death so that we could live forever. We get a little taste of what is to come—a foretaste of heaven. Through Scriptures, sermons, songs and sacraments Jesus is truly present with us with his power, his forgiveness, his love. Our faith is strengthened. It is good to be here together with Jesus!

So I can relate to Peter, can't you? In the midst of this amazing mountaintop experience, he says, **"It is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."** I mean we all want to camp out on "glory mountain" in a sense, don't we? We all wish the glorious moments of life would last longer than they sometimes seem to do, right? Who wouldn't want to camp out forever in the spiritual high points where God's presence seems so obvious that it doesn't feel so hard to have to walk by faith. Oh, I can relate to Peter, can't you?

And while his comment might have been a little awkward because he didn't even know quite what to say, it wasn't actually a wrong desire! It's the way things were always meant to be. In the beginning (I'm talking about in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve fled the presence of the holy God and tried to hide from him because they felt ashamed of their sin) God had wonderfully designed and gloriously made this world so that people were to recognize his handiwork and say, "How good, Lord, to be here!" I mean just imagine Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Imagine if instead of falling for Satan's lies they had instead said to each other, "You know, it's not like God is holding out on us or anything. I mean sure he said we're not supposed to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But look at all the other trees we *can* eat from! Look how beautiful this place is! Think about how extravagantly generous God is! He is a good, good Father. We lack no good thing. He comes around to personally spend time

with us so that we get to enjoy his company in the cool of the day. How good, Lord, to be here!”

Imagine if instead of coveting what was forbidden they praised God for his good, glorious creation all around them! Then we’d still be saying it, “How good, Lord, to be here!” There would be nothing that would prevent us from enjoying God’s gifts the way they were designed to be enjoyed. Our moments of happiness wouldn’t be few and far between. They wouldn’t be as fleeting as they sometimes now seem. Every day would be good, very good in the presence of God!

But we don’t live in that garden anymore, do we? So Peter, James, and John couldn’t stay there on the mountaintop with Jesus in his glory. And the reality is neither can we. Not yet.

**<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.**

**<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.**

What did they see up there? Well for a while they saw a sustained glimpse of Jesus’ divine glory and got a little foretaste of heaven, right? But then they didn’t see anyone with them anymore...except Jesus who again seemed so ordinary, so human. And as Jesus had led them up the mountain, now they went back down. They went down into the valley. You know that feeling too, don’t you? Of going down into the valley? Because if we’re honest that’s where a lot of life is lived, isn’t it? Where it’s not always one high point after another but full of many low points. Where we must truly walk by faith.

When the joy of Sunday sometimes seems so short-lived because the demands of making ends meet come fast and furious. When the responsibilities of raising a family can seem so overwhelming. When the love you give to others isn’t always returned in equal measure. When the kids get sick and you don’t know what to do. When communication is so difficult even between family members and friends and your own spouse. When life is so unpredictable and our health often seems so frustratingly beyond our control. When events happen that defy any satisfying explanation. When human solutions are so often woefully inadequate compared to the scope of the problems we face. When even our most fervent prayer requests sometimes go seemingly unanswered. You ever come off a mountaintop experience and the reality of the “real world” hits hard? You know that feeling? Down in the valleys of life you might not think, “How good, Lord, to be here!” because what you’re tempted to think is “What is going on here, Lord?”

So what do you think, friends? Was Jesus ruining the moment when he led Peter, James and John down from the top of the mountain? Was he ruining the moment when he didn’t say, “Yeah, Peter, you know what? Great idea. Let’s set up a campground up here and just hang out forever.” No, dear brothers and sisters! Because let’s be clear about something. You know

what's ruined the moment so to speak? It's sin. Sin is what has ultimately marred all our moments here on this earth. Sin is what ultimately causes profound moments of sadness. Sin is what strains even the best relationships. Sin is what distorts God's good gifts. The curse of sin is what ultimately will cause you and me to die. Sin has ruined our moment.

But make no mistake. That's exactly why Jesus was not and could not be content to stay up on the mountain top! For the same reason he would not, could not stay in heaven selfishly to enjoy the glory that rightfully belonged to him from before the creation of the world. But rather for us he sacrificially came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For us he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. You see Jesus Christ loved you and me so much that he left behind the glory of heaven in order to go to the cross to bear our sins away and to assume the curse of our death so that one day, in the hope of his resurrection victory, we too we share in his glory. First the cross, then the crown of eternal life. For Jesus and for us.

If only Peter had listened more closely to Jesus six days earlier when he was explaining all this he would have understood this better. If only we would pay closer attention to God's Word we would too. We would be less apt to shake our fist at God when things don't go our way. We would be less likely to think that we know better than God or question his will. We would be far less likely to ever doubt his faithfulness or his love when we must walk down through the valleys of this broken world and bear our earthly crosses.

But that's why we're always pointed back to God's Word. **"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"** says our Heavenly Father. And so we're pointed back to the word, always to the word. Friends, this is huge because I know sometimes it feels like God isn't there in your life or you're tempted to think, "He doesn't listen. He doesn't care! If he did he wouldn't let this happen to me!" But when you're down in the valley and your feelings betray you, then you must remember to drag your feelings to the facts and say to them, "Listen to him. Listen to Jesus!" Because who is Jesus? He is no mere mortal whose feelings betray him but the faithful Son of God, our Savior who in our place overcame every temptation, who conquered death and the grave, triumphed over despair and from the vantage point of eternal victory says, "I will be with you always till the very end of the age!" Who says, "Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you do not have to fear any evil for I am with you. Because I am the Good Shepherd I gave up my life for you so that you can dwell in the house of the LORD forever! And you want proof? Here...take and eat, take and drink....this is *for you*...for the forgiveness of all your sins. Enjoy this sweet time of fellowship free of charge. It's on me." Friends, God's promises have the power to sustain your faith not because I speak them but because they come signed, sealed and delivered by the completed work of our perfect Savior!

So I suppose you can imagine, we've been packing up our house. Wow, that's a lot of work. And it's emotionally tough. On the one hand it's wonderful because there are reminders all over of all these wonderful experiences we've had here, so many reminders of God's grace. On the other hand as we downsize and donate things we are reminded that life keeps moving on. Our

kids have gotten older so we don't need baby clothes anymore, a high chair and things like that. And it's hard to let go. It's hard to move on. You know one of the hardest things to let go of was our family camping tent. We've got so many wonderful memories here in Wisconsin camping in it, but we really can't take it with us. And to be honest it started leaking this past summer anyway. It's not a lot of fun camping when water is pouring through the roof of your tent in the middle of a thunderstorm! But that's how tents are though too. They're temporary. They don't last. Kind of like our earthly bodies which is why if we listen to God's Word we shouldn't get too at home in them. Because they're just like tents that we set up here and there and from place to place until the tent poles get brittle and the roof leaks and it's time to pull up the stakes of our earthly life. And hopefully we can say, "How good it was to be here!"

But friends, to know that the victory of Jesus means the resurrection of the body, to get a glimpse of this glory, and to believe the gospel means we can for certain say, "How great it will be to be there! In heaven!" Where the glory of the Lord will shine brighter than the Florida sun and the glorious presence of Jesus will chase away any remnants of the gloomy sadness of this sin-filled world. Where every bitter tasting experience here will only serve to make our experience there so much more gloriously sweet.

And so dear friends, I pray that in the light of Christ's victory, you might view your entire life from this heaven high gospel vantage point. Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ! Remember that for believers in Christ this means there is no such thing as a good-bye, just a cya later.

It's so good to be here together with Jesus, isn't it? Oh how good, Lord, to be here! ... But if this is good, friends... imagine what it will be like to say together one day in heaven, "How great, Lord, to be here! Hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus." Amen.