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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA
Transfiguration Sunday
February 14, 2021
2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

I'm glad to have you as my hiking partners this morning. During this pandemic time I've been trying to hike at least once a week, usually on Mondays, my day off. Today I'm on the trail to Oyster Dome. The trail begins by going down, and then goes up up up for about 2 miles.

Hiking has helped me keep my sanity during Covid – it gets me out of the house and gets my body moving, gives me good exercise, and most important, when I hike it clears my head and helps me see the bigger picture.

And so when I considered today's gospel story of Peter, James, and John hiking up the mountain with Jesus, I knew I needed to do what they did in order to get a sense of the bigger picture they experienced on the mountain with Jesus. I know Jesus is with me today, as he always is, so I'm heading with Jesus up the mountain – I'll see you again when I get to the top.

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Hi again – I've made it to the top of Oyster Dome – look over the Salish sea and the San Juan Islands – beautiful – quite a workout to get here – but worth it.

So let's talk again about the gospel for today from Mark 9. It begins with the words "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves." So, it's helpful to recall what actually did happen 6 days before that day. Six days earlier, Jesus had told his disciples that he would undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And Peter rebuked him, but Jesus said to him, "Get behind me Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things."

As I was hiking up here today I was trying to imagine what Peter, James, and John were thinking when they were hiking with Jesus up the mountain that day. For 6 days they've been living with the knowledge that the one they've given their lives to follow is going to suffer and be rejected and killed. And Peter has been living with the guilt that Jesus had called him out for setting his mind on human rather than divine things, even called him Satan!

Biblical scholars don't know exactly which "high mountain" it was where the disciples hiked with Jesus and where he was transfigured. Some assume it was Mount Tabor which was about 2,000 feet high, just like Oyster Dome, so I can imagine that like me they huffed and puffed their way up the mountain with Jesus that day. And as they were breathing hard and sweating, they were also feeling shattered. As if it wasn't enough to climb a high mountain, they also did it feeling like the rug was being pulled out from underneath them.

I wonder if that's how you're feeling these days...as if it isn't enough to have a worldwide pandemic, as if it wasn't hard enough work just to live our daily lives with masks and distancing and doing almost everything online, we also continue to have experiences that leave us shattered. I know some of you are

deeply grieving the death of someone you dearly loved. Some of you are frustrated beyond belief trying to schedule a Covid vaccination. Some of you educators are having to teach in ways you'd never have imagined. Some of you health care workers are tired to the bone and feeling much less appreciated than you were when this whole thing started. Some of you ache in your bones to visit your parents or to hug your grandchildren. Maybe you, too, feel like Peter, exhausted from the climb – from the daily grind of life - and feeling shattered because of the things in life that make it feel like the rug is getting pulled out from underneath you, too.

You don't have to climb a literal mountain to feel like that. But perhaps that's why Jesus took his disciples up a literal mountain that day. Because Jesus wanted to show them that it was when they were the most exhausted and feeling the most shattered that he was the most divinely present to them. When they got to the top of the mountain, Jesus appeared to them in dazzling clothes and Moses and Elijah, prophets who were long gone, were right there talking with Jesus. The veil between heaven and earth had been lifted and Jesus was showing them that he was beyond human boundaries, beyond their own human limitations.

Last Sunday in confirmation class we had a debate whether Jesus was more human or more divine. Here in this gospel passage it is more clear than ever that Jesus is holy, Jesus is the divine one who chooses to appear when we are struggling the most with being human.

And when God spoke from the clouds saying "This is my son, the beloved, listen to him," God made it clear that Jesus' entire being was one of love. The reason Jesus appeared to them transfigured on that mountain was because it was in their exhaustion, in their shattered state, that Jesus loved them the most.

My dear friends in Christ, it is when you are the most exhausted by daily life, and when things happen to you that leave you shattered, that Jesus loves you the most. Jesus, the holy one, appears to you to envelop you with light and love and mercy. And when you feel Jesus' closeness, you, like Peter, might also want to build a dwelling so that you can always live in that feeling, too.

On this Valentine's Day you can trust that it is on the days when human love fails, when human limitations exhaust you, when being human is just plain hard, that Jesus the divine shows up, to love you through every hard climb and shine God's light in your life. And remember, it's on those mountaintops of life when we are exhausted, where God's beauty is most clearly seen.... Amen.