

Two Mountains

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

- I. *Each mountain shows us God.*
- II. *Each mountain is beautiful.*
- III. *Only one mountain can give us life.*

The world we live in is a dangerous place. Being able to see what otherwise cannot be seen with the normal eye can save lives. Today, technology allows a new kind of scanner to be used at airports that can see things otherwise not detected by normal metal detectors. Yes, there are some debates as to how far is too far in examining a person boarding an airplane but proponents of the technology say it can make everyone flying safer.

Medical advances have allowed doctors to examine the inside of a person through an MRI scanner without having to perform surgery. Amazingly this scanner can reproduce a three dimensional image of a person and allow a thorough safe diagnosis.

Sometimes seeing makes all the difference between health and illness, between safety and danger. Today this Transfiguration Sunday this is a lesson for us. What we are asked to see however is not inside of a human body or merely behind clothing but today we are asked to look into the spiritual and the eternal.

A special connection exists between all three of today's readings. In the book of Exodus we encounter Moses coming down for a second time having encountered God and having received the law of the Lord. Moses had already taken God's people out of Egypt the land of slavery and to the foot of Mount Sinai. There Moses received the Ten Commandments but because of the people's unfaithfulness Moses condemned the people and destroyed the two original stone tablets containing God's law. Moses had to ascend the mountain a second time and this time he saw God and Moses' face radiated with glory. When Moses descended the mountain he had his face veiled so the people could see his radiance. At this time the people also saw God's law which is a reflection of that which is good and holy.

Today our Gospel reading shows us Jesus ascending a mountaintop with Peter, James and John. There too the disciples are allowed to see God's glory--this time as Jesus shows His divinity appearing dazzling white and along with Moses and Elijah from heaven. After seeing Jesus

this way Peter, James and John are not going to be quite the same people again.

Finally, in our Epistle reading Paul implicitly compares these two events and shows how in the end, despite their similarities they are quite different for us. Today we are to examine both Moses and Jesus and see how their mountaintop experiences are both similar yet very different in their affects on us today.

Moses encountered God on top of Mount Sinai. It was there that Moses originally received the Ten Commandments. At first the people responded very joyfully and enthusiastically. **"When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do.""** (Exodus 24:3). Sadly, the people's faithfulness and enthusiasm was very short lived because when Moses had returned to Mount Sinai after sharing the Ten Commandments with them they broke God's law and made for themselves an idol. Moses was so angry with the people that he actually threw the tablets of the commandments God had made at the people and they were broken.

The people were rebuked and Moses went again to the top of the mountain. God reassured Moses that He was with Him and would lead him to carry out God's will. It was then, this time on the mount that Moses asked to see God's glory. God agreed but warned Moses that Moses could not see His face because: **"But you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."** (Exodus 33:20). It was this encounter on the mountain that changed Moses' appearance. It was this encounter when Moses recreated stone tablets containing the law. When Moses descended the mountain though he himself did not originally know it but his face radiated. Because of this Moses' face was veiled so the people could look at him.

Moses' face would not remain permanently changed. His glow and radiance would eventually fade. So too would the glory and the beauty of the Ten Commandments. The problem is not with the commandments of God but with the people who fail to carry them out.

The Ten Commandments are good and they are pure. They reflect God's holiness and goodness. There is nothing wrong with the commandments but their beauty fades in our eyes because the longer we look at them and the better we understand them we see how evil and far from God we are. The Ten Commandments don't bring us closer to God they condemn us before God because no one has kept them. That which in itself is good and beautiful is ugly to us because of our sinfulness.

It is here we want to be cautious because just as the goodness encountered on top of Mount Sinai faded for Moses and for us we too may think that Jesus' Transfiguration is a temporary encounter, once beautiful but only for a short time. After all, when Jesus comes down from the mount is He not on His way to Jerusalem to be rejected and to die?

Jesus took Peter, James and John the three inner disciples to the top of a mountain and there Jesus showed them who He really is: God incarnate, the second person of the trinity. It was here they saw Jesus clothes as bright as a flash of lightning and along with Jesus two of the great Old Testament prophets: Moses and Elijah. Of special note here is what Jesus, Moses and Elijah speak about. Luke tells us that **"They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."** (Luke 9:31). They were talking about Jesus' imminent death by crucifixion which would happen at Jerusalem.

How could this short vision of Jesus arrayed in His heavenly splendor not soon disappoint too just like Moses and Mount Sinai? What could be worse than this joyful occasion turning sour knowing that Jesus would die?

It is here that faith alone shows us the way. The reason that this second mountain experience does what the first mountain cannot do is because it is Jesus who is going to die. Jesus' death is not just a death of a good man. It is not the death of a holy man like Moses and Elijah. No! The death of Jesus on the cross is God's death for us and for the sins of the whole world. Because Jesus is God no one takes His life from Him apart from His desire to die for us. And just as Jesus lays down His life for us so too does He have the power to raise Himself from the dead! Jesus Himself reminds us: **"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."** (John 10:17-18).

It is this Jesus--Jesus who is God and man--who on the cross removes our sin. This act is something no one or no thing can undo. The cross of Jesus gives us life and not death and it is why this mountain is greater than the first. Only through Jesus are we saved. But this gift is only seen, understood and received through faith. This is why Paul says what he does in Second Corinthians. **"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."** (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Today only by faith do we truly understand the Transfiguration. Only by faith do we understand God and receive His gifts.

Today we baptized Kahlen and Kyler Jahn and by so doing they are connected to Jesus. The world does not understand this nor can it do so. Today the world looks at young children such as these and focuses on how much life they have ahead of them; the world focuses on the here and the now. The eyes of the world show us youth, and life, and a while future ahead of them. The eyes of faith show us something else.

By faith we see these children like all of us here condemned by God's law from Mount Sinai. All of us are in need, the need that only Jesus, God incarnate can give.

Today in the waters of baptism our eyes of faith see life not going merely many decades but into all eternity. Today our eyes of faith see salvation and a place with God forever.