

Brackenhurst Methodist Church 29 March 2009 pm
The Open-hearted Follower: With Jesus on the Mountain

Welcome & Notices

Scripture:

Exodus 34:29-32

1 Kings 19:11-14

Definitely Matthew 17:1-16

Message

INTRODUCTION

- People meet God on mountains!
 - All of the stories we read this evening have people going up the mountain to have an encounter with God
- And while in the stories this is a literal climbing of the mountain, we also know it to be true in our own lives
 - The high points in our lives are very often the times when we have felt closest to God
- There's an exercise which I often do with people on Bible study courses, or retreats
 - I ask them to go and draw a graph of time verses closeness to God
 - * If you were close to God, mark it up, if far from God mark it down
 - Illustrates very effectively the mountain top experiences
- The peaks on the graph are the places where we were tight with God, times when we were very often away from the difficulties and trials of life
 - And the same is true of the stories that we read this morning
- Moses who goes up the mountain — for the second time — to get the law
 - Elijah who, and you know the story, had this amazing encounter with God as he faced off with the prophets of Baal, they come after him he asks where is God
 - * And then goes up and discovers his presence in the still, small voice.
 - And the story of the transfiguration
- Last week Peter made reference to the three 'special' disciples, Peter, James and John. In the story of the transfiguration we see one of those occasions when they are invited into a special experience with Jesus
 - With Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration

- So this evening we continue in our Lenten journey looking at the open hearted follower
 - Being with Jesus on the Mountaintop
 - * Being with Jesus when once again we hear the voice of God affirming to Jesus, and those around him, that he is indeed beloved and pleasing.
 - * Being with Jesus as we see what humanity can become, and that it is a glorious thing.
 - * And being with Jesus as he meets with Moses and Elijah.
- So tonight, as we speak about being with Jesus on the mountaintop
 - I want to recognise that we all need mountaintop experiences
 - The mountaintop experience is a gift for ministry
 - Then, thirdly, that we also need to come down from the mountain.

(1) We all need the mountaintop experience

- The first thing that I need to say is that we all need a mountaintop experience of God — and on a regular basis
 - Too often Christians are people who have simply agreed to abide by a certain set of rules or norms in terms of how to live their lives
 - * Norms which usually include going to church on a Sunday, and maybe Bible study during the week.
- And many people, if you speak to them will tell you that they have never had a key moment when they encountered God in a special way.
 - Whether that is by responding to an altar call, or being prayed for at a Holy Spirit day or simply, in their own hearts being reminded of the beauty, the truth and the reality of God
 - * There's a joke about a husband and a wife who have been married for many years, and the wife complains that her husband never tells her any more that he loves her.
 - * He says, well I told you on our wedding day, and if anything changes you'll be the first to know.
- Point is we need to hear people tell us that they love us
 - And the same is true for our faith
- We need to hear God telling us, reminding us, that he loves us, that he is there for us
 - That was a key experience for Jesus on the mountain:
 - * This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased...
- And indeed, this event takes place just as Jesus begins to contemplate his journey towards Jerusalem

- His rejection by the Jews, and the death that he must suffer
- Moses in the desert, after experiencing the terrible rejection of those he has led out of slavery goes up the mountain to encounter God
- Elijah: ups and downs: the high of the competition with the prophets of Baal; the rejection of having a contract taken out on his life
 - * Goes up the mountain
- In our spiritual journey we need to know that God is there and he loves us, especially when we are facing times of trial.
- And it seems to me, as I look at the three stories we have read today that there is a balance here
 - The rejection by humanity is balanced by the assurance of the acceptance by God
- Friends, we mustn't settle for a perpetual spiritual winter, but must know that there is always more
 - If we are willing to seek and go up the mountain.
- So firstly, then, we all need a mountain top experience to remind us who we are and to give us courage for the journey, especially in times when the journey seems hard.

(2) The mountaintop experience is a gift for ministry

- The mountaintop experience
 - For Jesus, for ELijah, for Moses
- Was an experience when they had 'face to face' personal contact with God and were set free to serve God again
 - The mountaintop experience for us needs to be the same
- It's not just a random moment that leaves you with a warm fuzzy
 - It is about meeting with God in a way that you walk away at that moment saying I know that God is real because he met with me tonight.
- So it is an encounter, firstly, that reminds us of the reality of the unseen world
 - A world which is there, but which we often don't pay attention to
 - It is an an encounter that calls us back to a reality that is different to the one in which we live every day
 - And many times in our lives it is an encounter that we need to revisit to be reminded of who we are really.
- But more than that, secondly, this story is a story that reminds us not just of a close moment with God, but ti also is a story that gives us a vision of what humanity can become.
 - What does that mean?

- If you read the understanding of Jesus given by Paul and other authors of the new Testament
 - And an understanding that we embrace today as Christ followers even though we often don't articulate it well
 - * We recognise Jesus as Fully Human, Fully Divine, both man and God, and man who was without sin
 - Jesus reveals to us what and who we, as man and women created in the image of God, can become.
 - * Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration gives to us a vision of what humanity can become
- And then thirdly this mountaintop experiences of Jesus reveals to us the sacramentality of the universe (environment).
 - We read that the three disciples saw only Jesus
 - * On top of the mountain, in the midst of nature, they saw only Jesus, Jesus in everything
- And so, on the mountain, we are reminded of an alternative reality, we are reminded of who people ought to be and what they can become, and we are reminded that Christ is in all.
 - On their own those things can be pretty meaningless
- Just things that, as I said earlier, give us a warm fuzzy!
 - But, as the open hearted follower of Jesus, the mountaintop experience is given to us as a gift for ministry.
 - * One thing I know about being a minister is that you can't do it in your own strength.
- If we are to minister effectively to those around us
 - Whether that is in a world in which everything seems to be upside down, or a world in which people are broken and struggling, and far from the glory of God
 - * Or a world in which the environment is raped and pillage for the enrichment of a few
- We need to know deeply within us that there is another reality, that people can become who they were created to be
 - That you can become who you were created to be
 - And in this world we can celebrate the created order
- The mountaintop experience is given as a gift for ministry, not just for our own enjoyment.

(3) But we need to come down

- Which brings me to my third point: we cannot stay on the mountain
 - The disciples said, let us put up shelters
 - * Let's get comfortable and stay here!
- In our consumer culture people want experience after experience, and sometimes that categorises the way we do Christianity as well
 - Some churches capitalise on that.
 - Every week has to be bigger and better and more exciting!
 - * Newer songs
 - * Better multimedia
 - * Smoke machines
 - We want experience after experience, we've got to make memories, and if this week's preacher isn't as dynamic as the guy we had last week
 - * Well, we'll just have to find somewhere else to go worship
- Friends, we cannot stay on the mountaintop, we have to come down!
 - And the first thing Jesus and his closest disciples encounter when they come down the mountain is evil.
- It would be nice to stay on the mountain away from all the darkness, but our task as open-hearted followers of Christ is to bring the light from the mountaintop experience down the mountain into the darkness of the world around us.
(Wright's comments)
- The affirmation of mountain prepares Jesus for the shame of the cross

Conclusion

- As Christ followers, open-hearted followers, we work with the glory in the shame, and the shame in the glory.
- We need to have hearts that are open to the transfiguration, and we need to become agents of the transfiguration in a South Africa which can seem very dark at the moment.
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

HEALING

- Tell the World