



Prayer: Lord, from the top of Your Holy Mountain, we look out upon the valley of those who suffer and cry for help. Fill us with Your strength so that we might minister to them with the love of Christ. And wherever there might be valleys within our own hearts, may your Holy Spirit bring redemption, healing, and hope. Amen.

Connect to God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Connect to Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Connect to Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But

Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” ⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

This Last Sunday, Dr. Jay Beavers reminded us about how the extravagance of our “mountain top” experiences must not cause us to forget those who are stuck in the valley. After all, Christ is not only found on the Holy Mountain, but also in the faces of the poor and imprisoned, as Christ himself taught (cf. Matt. 25:31-36).

This aspect of remembrance is crucial: When we are on top of the Holy Mountain, we must remember those in the valley. Likewise, when we are in the valley, we must remember the promised hope of an eternal Holy Mountain. As Jurgen Moltmann said in his book, *The Crucified God*, “Hope without remembrance leads to illusion, just as, conversely, remembrance without hope can result in resignation.”

Connect to Context:

In Matthew 17, Christ is transfigured before the eyes of the disciples. On top of the Holy Mountain, the temporal world of humanity and the eternal world of God meet in one

supernatural event, providing a glimpse into the glory of creation's future redemption. In this moment, we see the future hope breaking into the present. At this event, we see a clear example of the daily (albeit more hidden) movements of the Holy Spirit within our walk with God that pulls the future glory into our present — both as individuals and as a community.

The transfiguration is a radical moment of glory — certainly a high point in the ministry of Christ. However, Christ's ministry was not without its valley moments as well. He experienced both the heights of the Holy Mountain and the depths of crucifixion. And it is this dialectic — a back and forth — of which Dr. Jay reminds us: we are called to embrace both the mountain and the cross as well.

I am reminded of the famous landscape painting by the German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, in which he depicts the cross of Christ mounted upon a vast and gorgeous mountain landscape. It is a sublime painting that captures the sentiment of what it means to be a Christian in the present moment: we are both on the Holy Mountain but also participating in the crucifixion of Christ.

Such a state of being ought to change how we live in the world. As I read this morning in Jurgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*:

"I have resolved to think more intensively than I have done up to now about the meaning of the cross of Christ for theology, for the church and for society. In a civilization that glorifies success and happiness and is blind to the sufferings of others, people's eyes can be opened to the truth if they remember that at the centre of the Christian faith stands an unsuccessful, tormented Christ, dying in forsakenness. The recollection that God raised this crucified Christ and made him the hope of the world must lead

the churches to break their alliances with the powerful and to enter into the solidarity of the humiliated."

When we are on top of the Mountain, may we never forget that we bear the cross of Christ, and that this cross points to the crucified of history, who are lost in the valley of despair and destitution. But the Word spoken to this valley is the same hope that we see on the Mountain at the transfiguration — the glory of creation's future redemption and the final unity with God's eternal love.

Connect Heads:

What would it look like for churches to, as Moltmann said, break from their alliances with the powerful and instead “enter into the solidarity of the humiliated”?

What is the significance of the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration?

Why might the disciples want to make three dwelling places?

How might the Transfiguration and Dr. Jay’s sermon relate to the passage from Isaiah 40 ascribed to John the Baptist? “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (cf. Luke 3:4-6)

Connect Heart:

What was a time in which you saw someone step into the “valley” of another’s despair?

What does it mean to remember the hope of Christ when we are going through a valley?

Have you experienced a “Mountain Top” that changed your relationship to God?

Connect Hands:

Did you cause harm in word or deed to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?