

## *What have we discovered?*

*Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36*

Sometimes going on a trip can change everything. Often, it helps us to see the world and ourselves in a different light. Going somewhere can change our perspective on things that we are immersed in. Through the journey, if we're open to it, we can discover things we haven't recognized before. And in the end, we end up learning more about ourselves.

The quote on the front of the bulletin today says, "The best view comes after the hardest climb." Having climbed a few mountains in my life, I would agree with this wholeheartedly. I was reminded of a hike that my parents took us on back when I was probably 12. We went to Waterton, Alberta. We took a boat across the lake, and when we got to other side, we were going to hike. They assured me that it was a short hike: only 5 km. What they failed to let me know is that it was going to be switchbacks the entire way up the mountain, which was very strenuous and exhausting. And it didn't stop there: once we did the switchbacks for 5 km in the heat of the summer of southern Alberta, I was done...but the hike was not.

We got to the top part onto this nice landing. The next part looked really exciting. There was going to be a ladder that we had to climb up, go through a tunnel to get to this lake. When we got to said tunnel, do you know what came through the tunnel? Wolverines. Because that's not scary. So we waited. I remember pulling on my dad's sleeve, and he was like, "Just remain calm." Calm? I'm not going to remain calm! There's creatures in there. So after a time, they did mind their own business and away they went. I was told how special this was and how I should really appreciate the fact that I actually saw wolverines in my life. Which I appreciate now, but not at the time. So now we had to go through the tunnel. Part of me is thinking, well, what's on the other side? Like, are there more? They assured me that it was going to be fine. So we climbed up this ladder; we got to this little tunnel that you had to crawl through. I mean, you could hunch a little bit, but my family is rather tall. So we were crawling through this tunnel. And when you got to the other side? There was a cable. And a ledge about *this* wide, that we then had to scramble across. In the immortal words of my father, hold on tight, don't let go. And don't look down. And I'm like, but looking down is half the fun! I mean, it was beautiful: the vista that you could see, the sheer cliff – I still can't believe they actually took us on this, but

they did. So we were holding onto the cable, and you were kind of sidestepping while holding on, never letting go.

Then finally, when we got to the other side, it opened up into this beautiful meadow with this amazing glassy lake that had the most beautiful colours, and the sun just shone. And when we got up there, we sat down and we just rested and got our breath back, and actually had some of the water, which was fresh and delicious and had a picnic. Then we decided we would stay for a little while. It turned out, we had hiked up with our tents and everything else. I hadn't realized we were going to be sleeping there that night, with the bears and the wolverines, but we did.

What was most important about the whole thing, was that I realized – and I whined a lot on the way up – when we got to the top, things changed. It was worth the effort. I had more strength than I thought. Things that seemed scary in the end became beautiful as I grew to understand our connection with one another. It was truly a euphoric feeling when we got to that lake and saw the beauty of it. Even coming back, when we had to crawl back across that ledge and through the tunnel again. Looking down onto the town of Waterton, knowing how high we were, was incredible. I think what that experience helped me to understand is that we were closer together as a family because we had to trust one another, rely on one another, and we challenged ourselves to do something that we wouldn't normally do. We had to pay attention and we had to be alert, and because of that, we were safe.

Thinking about living through the pandemic that we've been through, I think it's been a lot like journeying up a mountain. We've all learned new survival skills. We've found that even when we are completely depleted, we can keep on going. We rediscovered some things of the past, like the joy of receiving an actual letter in our mailbox from a friend or a family member. We've rediscovered also what is most important to us. We've let go of things that we used to fill our time up with but really, don't matter as much as we thought. We've also discovered how differently we all react to the same situation. There are people in our midst who thrive and who do well in the midst of crisis, and there are others of us who freeze and sometimes completely shut down. Our fears are also quite diverse. One thing that might make you afraid is not going to be the same thing that makes me afraid. Our comfort levels are going to be very different, and we're really experiencing that as restrictions are being lifted.

But through all of this, what is most important is that we are called to be a people of faith, which means we need to meet each other face-to-face in whatever place each of us is at, without judgement, without assumption, but with an open heart and an open mind. We need to act in the best interests of the whole and the common good. And we've also learned how easy it is to forget what we've learned and to simply go back to our old ways. The question

remains: are we still climbing up the mountain, are we at the top of the mountain, or are we coming back down?

Journeys such as this build up our resilience. The Oxford dictionary defines resilience as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.” Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from negative experiences, bolstered by *protective factors* – the supporting aspects of life – and reduced by *risk factors*, which are the vulnerabilities that impact our capacity.

So what has built up the resilience of the people of faith? What can we learn from the story of Moses’ encounter with God on the top of the mountain, or Jesus’ encounter with Moses and Elijah at the top of the mountain? First thing is that we need companions; we need people to go on this journey with. For Jesus, Jesus took the disciples. We also know that on these journeys that what can happen is affirmation. The appearance of Moses and Elijah was an affirmation for who Jesus was and what Jesus was going to do. Moses in this story is a figure that reminds us of the past, and Elijah is the prophet who will one day turn people’s hearts back to the covenant with God. The transfiguration of Jesus offers a glimpse of what is possible – not only for Jesus, but for all humanity. The transfiguration – the changing of Jesus in this dazzling light – bears witness to the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ. While on the mountain, Jesus is given support. He has people that he can speak with who have followed God’s call before. The disciples hear the message that Jesus is the Chosen One of God and that we are called to listen to Jesus. And Peter desires to create dwelling spaces on the top of the mountain to honour this amazing moment, and though it’s well-intentioned, it is counter to the call of God. Taking time to be in the presence of God is essential to our wellbeing – is essential to us building our resiliency. It gave Moses, for instance, the strength and the courage to share God’s word and God’s covenant with the Hebrew people. It gave Jesus clarity and strength to start a movement that would change norms and behaviours, that would call people to live in love. Not people that they actually loved, but people that they hated at times. And most importantly: you can’t stay on top of the mountain. They needed to come down the mountain in order to live God’s mission in the world. Jesus was about breaking barriers that divide; not about creating more walls or dwelling spaces. Jesus was on a mission. Jesus invites us all to follow. And what’s most important is that we are not simply called to sit and bask in that amazing inspirational moment, but we are called to live out our faith in the world. A mission is not a project. It’s about being a faithful presence in the world. Mission is bearing witness to the love of Jesus and the reign of God, and it is joining the Spirit’s movement in our neighbourhood, seeking reconciliation and renewal of all things. The church, the community of faith, is only the community of faith when it exists for others. So staying on the top of the mountain would not achieve what Jesus was calling us to do and be. Holding on to that inspirational moment in our life is not our purpose. Our purpose is to take these moments and let them work through us, in order to transform this world in which we live, into a world where we understand and respect every single person.

Where we act in love always. We are called to help bring peace, justice, and love to this world. With Jesus as our example, we come to understand our call. Think about it: the first thing Jesus did when he came down from the mountain was to heal the boy. It brought hope to the father, it brought hope to the people witnessing that moment, when it felt like all was lost. The time spent on that mountain with Moses and Elijah provided Jesus with a clear purpose, and it provides the community of faith – those of us who are gathered – with a clear purpose as well.

In *A Song of Faith*, which is one of our creedal statements, we proclaim the following: “We sing of God’s good news lived out; a church with purpose. Faith nurtured, hearts comforted. Gifts shared for the good of all. Resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize. Fierce love in the face of violence. Human dignity defended. Members of a community helped and inspired by God, corrected and comforted. Instrument of the loving spirit of Christ, Creation’s mending. We sing of God’s mission.”<sup>1</sup>

We know what’s happened in the world this week. We need to take time with God in order to have the strength, the energy, and the clarity to live with purpose in this world. And as a faith community, our purpose is to bring fierce love in the face of violence. How will we do that together? How will we hold on to that resilience that we have built up in order keep going and live out the mission of God in this world? That is our challenge, and I hope you will come down the mountain and greet whatever is down there with hope, with possibility, and with faith.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Song of Faith*, The United Church of Canada 2006.