

"WELCOME TO THE MOUNTAIN"

A Sermon By

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Park Avenue United Methodist Church  
106 East 86th Street  
New York, New York 10028  
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## "WELCOME TO THE MOUNTAIN"

### INTRODUCTION

The bumper sticker read: "Welcome to San Diego. Now go home!" Soon there was another one, "Enjoy San Diego. Then go home". People who have been there say that San Diego is a friendly city. It's also a city bursting with promise.

San Diego is now the seventh largest city in the United States and many folks who live there feel that it's big enough. And so they put bumper stickers on their cars, "Welcome to San Diego. Now go home". And to be sure you take the hint, they've put their airport right in the middle of the city.

Now this not-so-subtle hint by the people of San Diego is a reminder to me of one of the subtle messages of the Gospel of Christ. "Enjoy the mountain. Now go home".

On occasion we need to be reminded that there are two dimensions to the Christian life: the mountain of exultation and the valley of service. The mountain...where we encounter God...where we feel our souls refreshed...where we find a new motivation for the living of our lives...where we see the distant view and gain the new perspective for daily living. "I have been to the mountain-top" said Martin Luther King in a memorable speech. "I have seen the Promised Land". The mountain-top and then the valley. The valley...where we maintain our responsibilities....where we put it into practice...where we reach out to those who are hurting....where we seek to be the body of Christ at work in our world. Two dimensions and friends, we live in both. Three thoughts to share.

### PITY THE PERSON WHO NEVER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAIN

First, pity the person who never ascends the mountain. He or she misses out on so much. There's a story about a baby who loved to clap her hands. She clapped for everything, whether it be her lunch, her toys, playing with her parents, or sitting watching the waves roll in at the beach. Her parents said about this, "We only worry that someday she'll stop".

To ascend the mountain of exultation is to be aware of both creation and Creator. It is to be aware of the grandeur and the majesty of life. It is to experience unlimited joy at the privilege of being a part of God's grand scheme of creation. Thank God for those mountain-top moments of life.

I think that children know that kind of exhilaration instinctively. In his book, Sermon In Stone, Mel Ellis tells of a class of geography students. They had taken a tour of the earth by a book. At the end of the semester they were asked to list what they considered to be the Seven Wonders of the World. The top picks were: Egypt's Great Pyramid, the Taj Mahal, the Grand Canyon, the Panama Canal, the Empire State Building, St. Peter's Basilica and China's Great Wall.

While tallying the votes, the teacher noticed that one little girl had not turned in a paper. She approached the student and asked if she was having trouble with her list and the little girl responded, "Yes...a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many!" To which the teacher replied, "Well, tell us what you have and maybe we can help you".

Reluctantly, the little girl stood up and began to read her paper,

"I think the Seven Wonders of the World are to touch  
and to taste, to see and to hear, and then to run and  
to laugh and to love."

It would be tough to come up with a better list than that...don't you agree?

There is a hunger within human hearts to live on the mountain-top. Who can blame Simon Peter for suggesting that they build three booths, one for the Master, one for Moses, and one for Elijah so they could stay there on the mountain forever? Simon wanted to capture that magical mountain moment of being closer to God than he had ever been before. What would you and I give to have such an encounter? I think that even the most shallow of believers would probably trade all he or she has for such an experience. The mountain-top.

At the end of World War I, there was a great Jubilee Service in London's Royal Albert Hall. And sitting on the platform that evening were various dignitaries and famous people. Joseph Fort Newton, an American clergyman, was there sitting next to George Bernard Shaw. During the service, the audience rose and sang Isaac Watt's great hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past". After they finished singing, it's said that Shaw, moved by the chorus of thousands, leaned over to Newton and said, "I'd rather have written that hymn that all my silly plays".

For a brief moment, George Bernard Shaw got a glimpse of life from the mountain-top. His commitment to rationalism never allowed him to climb it, perhaps...but he knew it was there. So put this down first today, pity the person who never ascends that mountain of exultation...who never in his life senses the glory of God, our Creator and Sustainer. Let's go on.

PITY THE PERSON WHO YEARNES FOR THE MOUNTAIN, BUT REFUSES THE VALLEY

In the  
second

place, pity even more the person who yearns for the mountain of exultation but refuses the valley of service.

A number of years ago, Billy Graham took part in a television show in London that included some well-known British personalities. The host was discussing the evangelistic crusade that was going on in Earls Court. He asked Graham, as they always do, "Do all those people who come forward to the altar...do they really 'last'?" A prominent actress seated next to him didn't like the question and commented, "And what if they don't?"

Everyone looked a bit startled, including Billy Graham. She went on,

"What if, in all their lives, they have just that one  
beautiful moment with God as they come and stand at His  
altar? ....isn't that better than nothing?"

Well, perhaps. Then again, perhaps not. Some people there are who have a mountain-top experience and they exclaim, "This is it!" And they think they have captured the essence of the Christian faith in a bottle that they can slip into their pocket and take home with them. Later on they open the bottle on Easter or Christmas Eve, and they find it's empty. In other words, the experience has not lasted. It's evaporated. It's now a pleasant, but distant and fuzzy memory. But, because they have been up there on the mountain-top even for a

few brief moments, they think they possess the real thing. They think they know what it is to follow Jesus. And their faith is apt to falter.

It might be better if they had never ascended the mountain if they have substituted a momentary experience for a lifetime of discipleship. In other words, the mountain-top is not enough. It is not enough!

I recall a classic story from years back about Dr. Albert Einstein. Apparently he received many requests for help. The most unusual one came from a terribly distraught mother. She wrote,

"Dear Dr. Einstein,

My son thinks he is Jesus. I write to ask if you would talk to him. For no one else will he come down from the mountain and he has been there for three weeks. Will you do this for a broken-hearted mother?"

Einstein talked with the son, and he came down from the mountain. And later on Einstein explained to his friends,

"I didn't argue with his delusions. Rather I reminded him that Jesus came down from the mountain to become a 'fisher' among men."

FROM THE MOUNTAIN-TOP TO THE VALLEY OF SERVICE

Yes, Jesus did come down from the mountain. It was shortly after His Transfiguration experience that He healed the epileptic boy. All of which is to say that the only kind of mountain-top experience really worth having is one that leads us down from the mountain of exultation into the valley of service. The living proof of an authentic encounter with God 'in Christ' is always a changed life. A life that leads to service and the giving of self.

Merve Griffin sometime back was interviewing Charlton Heston on his delightful talk show. You'll recall that Heston is the actor who played the part of Moses in the Ten Commandments and also starred in Ben Hur and painted the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistene Chapel as Michelangelo. Merve Griffin asked Heston if any of the characters he portrayed in his religious film roles had affected or changed his spiritual outlook. Heston didn't answer right away. He thought for a few seconds and then slowly said,

"Well, Merve....you can't walk barefoot down Mount Sinai and be the same person you were when you walked up".

I liked that. There's the clue to a real mountain top experience. A real...an authentic mountain-top experience with God who has come to us in Christ...leaves us as changed persons. It is an experience that opens our eyes...that helps us to see the world as God sees it and intends for it to be. And what God sees is a world that is in need.

An artist asked a friend to come to see a painting he had just finished. Arriving at the painter's house, the friend was escorted by an assistant to a dark room where he was asked to wait. After about ten minutes, the artist

entered the room and warmly greeted his guest.

"I suppose you thought it unusual to be left in that dark room for so long" said the artist. "Yes" said the friend. "I did".

"Well" said the artist, "I knew that if you came into my studio with the glare of the street in your eyes, you could not appreciate the fine coloring of the picture. So I left you in a dark room till the glare had gone out of your eyes."

I think that a mountain-top experience ought to do something like that for us. It ought to get the "glare" of the world out of our eyes so we can see the world as God sees it. He sees it as a world that is in need. He calls us to leave the mountain-top where we have gathered in praise and joy to go down into the valley of service...to retrace the steps of His Son who left the mansions of glory for the stable of humility and self-giving love. We are to be "incarnation" of the Risen Christ in service to the world.

And dear friend, remember that Christ still walks that valley today. Arthur J. Gossip was visiting a parishioner in a working district of Glasgow. It was around four in the afternoon and it had been an exhausting day. He stood, he said, at the bottom of a five story tenement building where one of his parishioners lived on the top floor. It was a long climb to the top and he was tired. Promising himself that he would return the next day to make that call, he started to leave. Then he saw a vision. He saw a pair of stooped grey shoulders climbing the steps. He realized in that moment that it was a vision of the Master. A voice inside of him seemed to say, "Then I'll have to go alone". Gossip suddenly felt revitalized, a new burst of energy came into his body and he started up the steps. Later he reported of this vision, this incident, saying "We went to her door together". "We went together". There is the key to a spiritual life that does not leave us, that does not fade into a fuzzy distant memory that fails to motivate and move us.

#### CLOSING

I hope you have received a blessing from our worship here this morning. I hope the music, the prayers, the fellowship have helped to bring you a little closer to God than you were when you came in here. That's great, if it has. Not just this morning, but every time you come in here to worship.

However, there are people outside these walls who need your love and your witness of faith. Share it. They may live next door to you. They may work next to you in the classroom or the office. You may pass them on the street on your way home. "Enter to worship. Depart to serve" is the phrase that many churches put in their bulletin. You go now into the valley of service in the spirit of the Living Christ. If I may paraphrase that bumper-sticker on the car in San Diego, "Welcome to the mountain. Now go home". Back into the valley to seek, to save, and to serve - in the name of Christ.

"Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today.  
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way.  
He has no tongue but our tongues to tell men how He died;  
He has no help but our help to bring them to His side."

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness in these moments, O God.  
Go with each of us as we prepare to go from the mountain into the valley of service. Speak to us that we may speak. Tell us where to go and what to do. Open our ears to hear Your message and give us the will to do what we are told. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus - the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: January 14, 1990

O THOU WHO ART the light of the kinds that know Thee,  
the joy of the hearts that love Thee, and  
the very strength of the wills that serve Thee...

HEAR OUR THOUGHTS....as we enter into these quiet moments of  
prayer. Here remind us that "more things are wrought by  
prayer than this world has ever dreamed."

STEADY US AND SUSTAIN US, O God and Father of us all, with the  
"blessed assurance" that our many problems can be met and  
mastered with Your help, Your wisdom, Your grace and  
guidance.

PURGE FROM our lives all that which prevents us from coming in  
touch with Your Spirit. Help us to overcome the tendency  
to always think of ourselves first. Enable us to fully  
concentrate on You "in spirit and in truth" that we may  
find that inner peace and inner power that makes a  
difference!

THANKFUL WE ARE, O GOD, that you have brought us safely through this week  
that has been demanding, that has also been difficult and  
discouraging for many gathered here in worship.

Renew our perspective in these quiet moments.  
Help us to see life from higher ground.

Where there is personal disorder, bring peace.  
Where there is lingering illness, bring healing.  
Where there is disturbing doubt, bring faith.  
Where there are broken hearts...broken dreams, bring  
reassurance and fresh courage and high hope.

AND LORD, WE PRAY not only for ourselves, but also for others - especially  
for the person sitting next to us in the pew..the person  
to our left...and to our right.

WE PRAY for those with whom we work - in the office, the class  
room, the hospital. We hold in our hearts our loved  
ones from whom we are separated by distance, but from  
whom we are not separated by thought, love and concern.

REMEMIND US THIS HOUR as we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend, that  
we cannot fellowship with YOU, dear Lord, if in our hearts we  
reject, neglect or pass by our brother in need. Take us and  
use us to carve Your will in the world where we live and walk.

All this we ask in the spirit of Jesus, in whom we find  
life's highest hope as well as its deepest meaning. In His  
name and spirit we now pray.

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

- |   |                         |                      |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. <u>Marion Busk</u>   | 2. <u>Daisy Herrick</u> | 3. <u>Ada Kinney</u> |
| 4. <u>Berkley Evans,</u><br><u>father of Bruce, Sidney, Nova Scotia</u> | 5. _____                | 6. _____             |

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to \_\_\_\_\_ who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray.... For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"



FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation....a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, January 14, 1990

I. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. A word of welcome to the visitors in the congregation this morning. Take a moment to fill out a visitor card or sign a Guest Book.
- B. Be free in the sharing of your name. Make yourself known to us. Join us downstairs for coffee. Work with us in our programs of outreach and service to others...
- C. Our Church has some deep roots in the soil of this part of the city. Founded in 1837, this is the fourth building... we minister in the name of Christ and it is: in His loving spirit....

II. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are there in the bulletin for you to review. Do this on your own noting the word about the canvass...pledges are still being received....up to pledges totalling \$
- B. Be sure to pick up your box of offering envelopes, a copy of "A Year With the Bible" and the monthly news sheet. Offering envelopes in the rear of the Russell Room. Monthly news sheet in the narthex and on the table downstairs.
- C. Note the meetings set for this week: Worship Committee on Tuesday. Finance on Thursday evening.
- D. Adult Fellowship activities include a Brunch and Browse time next Sunday and two weeks from today the annual Super Bowl party at the parsonage. Mountain-top to find out winner...

III. TONIGHT: FELLOWSHIP SUPPER

- A. Tonight is our First Fellowship Supper of 1990....we have about four of these across the year. Sponsored by the Outreach Committee, it begins around 6:15...and will present Frank High who will speak on his adventures in Haiti in October, two weeks there as part of a work camp.

IV. OFFERING

- A. Special appeal...envelopes in pews....Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday. "It is more blessed to give than to receive". Remembering these words of Jesus, let us worship God with...

V. ALDRSGATE CLASS

- A. A brief word about the Wednesday evening study group which goes by the name, Aldersgate Class...a solid, historical, Methodist name...connected with Wesley's change of direction.
- B. I'm told that starting this coming Wednesday that a new book will be introduced. It's by Earl Palmer and the title, The Enormous Exception: Meeting Christ in the Sermon on the Mount.
- C. Now's a good time to join in...the fun and the fellowship...and the inspiration and support of such a study group. Wednesday evenings.....7:30 PM. Third Floor.

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prayer. Here remind us that "more things are wrought by  
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