

**Luke 9:28-36**  
**Fifth Sunday of Epiphany**  
**The Transfiguration of Our Lord**  
**Sermon Series: Almighty Power**  
**Jesus Lets His Power Shine Through**

**Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church**  
**Winchester, VA**

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About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup>Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. <sup>31</sup>They spoke about his departure, <sup>9</sup> which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup>As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what he was saying.)

<sup>34</sup>While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

There are a number of mountaintop moments throughout the pages of Scripture. In the Old Testament, Abraham ascended Mount Moriah with his son, Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice to God. God gave the law to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. David captured Mount Zion from the Jebusites and established Jerusalem, the City of David, where Solomon would build the Lord’s Temple; and Elijah faced off against the prophets of Baal on the peak of Mount Carmel. In the New Testament, there are a number of important mountains too. Jesus once delivered a very powerful sermon on the top of a mountain, a sermon we now refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. And after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven from the top of the Mount of Olives.

That isn’t even an exhaustive list by any means. There are enough events that take place on the tops of mountains that it gets us wondering, why? Why so many mountains? Well, I suppose part of it has to do with the fact that the area of the world in which the events of the Bible take place is a rather mountainous area. But I wouldn’t chalk it all up to mere coincidence because it seems like almost every time there’s a mountaintop moment in the Bible it’s coupled with some sort of demonstration of God’s almighty power. Mountains, in and of themselves, evoke an idea of power in our minds, don’t they? So it really isn’t all that surprising that God would use that to His advantage by integrating those powerful pieces of His Creation into the more personal displays of His almighty power.

The mountaintop moment from our Gospel lesson this morning is certainly no exception. Our text begins in Luke 9:28. **About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.** So, in order to understand the events that take place on the top of that mountain we need to back up a little to find out what that conversation was that took place eight days before. It’s a conversation I think many of you are familiar with. Jesus was alone with His disciples and He who they He was. **“You are the Christ of God,”** Peter answered (Lk 9:20b).

Jesus commended his answer and said that it was on that confession—that Jesus was the Christ—that the Christian church would take its foundation. Then Jesus went on to explain what it meant that He was the Messiah. He said, **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life”** (Lk 9:22). What a blessing it would have been for Jesus if His disciples had stepped up to plate then promising to follow Him through whatever was coming. Instead, you may remember, Peter challenged Jesus, saying that He shouldn’t even suggest something like that might happen. With the same lips that moments before had confessed Jesus as the Messiah Peter made clear that he didn’t see suffering as being any part of that. But Jesus insisted that it was necessary and added that it would not only be He who would suffer but that the disciples, if they chose to follow Him, would have an equal share in that suffering and rejection.

That certainly cannot have been what the disciples had in mind when they had started following Jesus. Was that all that would come from following Jesus? Suffering and rejection? Those words were difficult for them to swallow and you can imagine they were still very fresh on their minds when a week later, Jesus took three of them up this mountain to pray. While Jesus was praying, Peter, James, and John drifted off to sleep, they awoke as Jesus’ appearance began to change. His face which, to all the world, looked like that of any other man began to glow with the brightness of the sun, as Jesus, the Son of God, who had come into this world in human form to be the servant of us all, was revealed for whom He truly is, the Lord of all creation.

And suddenly, there standing next to Jesus, were Moses and Elijah. Now, from the snapshots that the Bible gives us of Elijah and Moses we know that they were admirable, God-fearing men. But they weren’t without their flaws. They were sinners, just like you and I. But they were sinners who had placed their trust in Jesus, the promised Messiah who would bring salvation from their sins. From the snapshots we have of those two men, we know that they experienced plenty of the opposition and rejection that Jesus had spoken of to His disciples. But because they had placed their trust in Jesus, that suffering had now come, for them, to an end. And because they had placed their trust in Jesus, no evidence of their flaws and sins remained. Now, as they stood beside Jesus on top of that mountain, they too were robed in the glorious splendor and majesty of heaven.

But they had not come just to stand there with Jesus; they had something to discuss. Their conversation dealt with Jesus’ departure from this world. Unlike the twelve disciples, they did not counsel Jesus against seeing His mission to completion. Moses and Elijah would likely have pointed Jesus to message of Scripture given in the Law and in the Prophets; Scriptures Jesus had come into this world to fulfill. So these two men, who hundreds of years before had both been comforted by Jesus on mountaintops of their own, now appeared on this mountain to lend their counsel and comfort to Him.

As their discussion came to a close, Peter spoke up, **“Master, How good it is for us to be here!”** And in that, He was absolutely right. How good it was for all of them to be there! As Jesus looked forward to the enormity of the suffering and grief that He would endure when He went down from that mountain, He would have found great comfort in the encouragement of Moses and Elijah that this was indeed what He was destined to do. In the months and years to come, as those three disciples came to understand just what it was Jesus had been talking about when He spoke of the crosses that they must suffer as they continued to follow Him, what great comfort they must have found comfort in having seen their Savior revealed in His full power and

glory and in having seen Moses and Elijah standing there alongside Jesus, crowned with the glory that all the saints share when their journey through this world meets its end.

Wouldn't it be great if we were able to stand witness to such a glorious event? Wouldn't it be awesome if we had our own mountaintop moment to carry us through the struggles we face as we live out our lives? I guess that just isn't our lot though, or is it? Welcome, my friends, to your personal, mountaintop experience. Do you wish that you could catch a glimpse of the Almighty Power of God? You have seen it, right here at this font as God has snatched infant children and grown adults from Satan's grasp. You've seen it and experienced it at the altar where God reaches out to you personally and offers you the forgiveness of sins. You get that mountaintop experience every week, as we gather around God's Word and revisit the promises He's given us therein.

Why else are you here this morning, and what keeps you coming back each week, if not because you relish what it is your God does for you here? Some weeks we may be less eager than others to come gather here for worship. But when we arrive, we find much needed rest, a break from all the craziness of the world and the depressing things we hear and read about in the news. We find calm and shelter from individuals and agendas that rage against our Christian faith. Wouldn't it be great if we could just stay here, studying God's Word together, revisiting His joyous promises, enjoying good Christian company, and eating chili until kingdom come? Peter had similar thoughts on that mount of transfiguration, **"Let us put up three shelters,"** he begged Jesus, **"one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."**

As much as Peter wanted that moment to extend as long as possible, God had other plans. But we understand where Peter was coming from, don't we? If going down from mountain meant that Jesus would suffer and die and he and the other eleven would be persecuted and rejected, then why not stay there with the Messiah who was shining with all the glory he had always imagined? But the reason Jesus had come into our world was not to camp out on that mountain with the apostles and the prophets. He had another mountain to visit, one called Calvary. He had to go down from the mountain that day so that he could go on to give up His life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, so that Peter and the others, and you and I could all be clothed in His radiant glory just as Moses and Elijah were.

Peter, James, and John were not destined to stay on that mountain either. That was not the purpose to which Jesus had called them. They had been called so that, after His departure, they would be able carry on the gospel news to a world filled with sinners who needed to hear that message of salvation.

When we come to worship here at Shepherd of the Hills we get our mountain top moment. We see Jesus, God's own chosen Son, our Savior, revealed to us in Scripture. We see the glorious life that awaits us when we join the saints around His throne. It is indeed good for us to be here. But we can't stay. The day will come when our purpose is nothing more than to gather before God in public worship and sing His praises day after day, but it is not this day. You are welcome to come here every Sunday to recharge your batteries and stock up on encouragement for the week to come, but in the meantime, we have a mission to carry out. A mission started by Peter and the Twelve that will continue until Jesus comes again, to let His glory and His Almighty Power shine through us into the world as we preach the good news of His salvation.

So welcome to Shepherd of the Hills, I hope you enjoy your time here, and I hope you come again, but you can't stay, because we have work to do. Amen.