

2024 02 11 – *Mountain Peak Moments*

Scripture: Mark 9:2-9 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

On Friday afternoon, we held a funeral service for Irene Corney here at First United Church. She was 92 years old when she died. She had birthed and raised 7 children who then produced 17 grandchildren. There were many things to celebrate in Irene's life and the service was full of special moments. But the one that stands out for me was a recording of one of Irene's granddaughters singing "You are My Sunshine." You see, this granddaughter had planned to be at the service but the weather had forced her to watch from home. Just half an hour before the service began, her mother received a text with this recording. It was shared with the congregation at the end of the eulogy.

As we sat and listened to this sweet voice coming from a cell phone held up to the pulpit microphone, you could feel the energy of the Spirit in the room. It was a truly sacred moment. Not because the singing was perfect, it wasn't, but it was filled with emotion, emotion that was raw and very real. In that voice was the grief of the moment, mixed with the memories of what had been and tinged with the hope of what was to come. It was a transforming experience, a true mountain peak moment.

Today's scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark describes another mountain peak moment. Jesus and three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, climb to the top of a mountain so they can be alone. But while they are there something miraculous happens. Jesus is transfigured before their eyes. His clothes

become a dazzlingly white—whiter than any earthly bleach could make them!
And then, things get even stranger. Two of the ancient prophets, Moses & Elijah appear and begin talking with Jesus.

The disciples stood in awe of this spectacle. James and John were dumbstruck, silent, an appropriate response. But Peter, as usual, spoke before thinking and blurted out an offer to make shelters for the prophets. This was, no doubt, his way of dealing with the myriad of emotions that came with such mind-boggling experience.

Finally a cloud came overhead and from the cloud a voice spoke saying, “This is my Beloved, my Own; listen to this One.” And then the ancient prophets disappeared, Jesus’s clothes lost their brilliance and they were alone again.

We don’t know what was said as Jesus and his disciples stood on top of that mountain. Maybe Jesus took this a teaching moment. Maybe they went off on their own and prayed. Maybe they stood in silence and let the experience sink in. Maybe they just turned around and started back down the mountain. All we know is that, as they were coming down from that mountain peak, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until after he had died and risen from the dead.

You see, that’s what this story was all about. Six days before this mountain peak moment, Jesus had been telling his disciples that his life was not going to be easy. He had told them that he would suffer and even be put to death. And then

he talked about how much they would have to let go of in order to follow him. He let them know that being his disciples required a willingness to deny those parts of themselves that were no longer useful or true.

This speech had, no doubt, created serious fear and anxiety amongst his followers. Jesus probably knew that these three men, these leaders within his group of disciples needed some additional inspiration. They needed a mountain peak moment, they needed an awe-inspiring glimpse of the Sacred. They needed to feel the Spirit move within them.

Mountain peak moments come in many different shapes and sizes. They can be as big and awe-inspiring as the view from a mountain top, or they can be as tiny and sweet as the face of a new-born baby. They can be as colourful as sundogs in a winter sky, or as monochromatic as a snow-covered field appearing on a foggy morning. They can be as loud as the cymbals of an orchestra in a massive concert hall or as quiet as the silence of a coulee far from the nearest highway. Mountain peak moments come in many different ways. What are some of the mountain peak moments that you have experienced? What are some of things that you have seen, or heard or experienced that inspired you? (wait for answers)

Mountain peak moments are those times in our lives when we feel the Sacred filling us with a sense of awe, joy, serenity, and love. They are the moments in our lives, both big and small, that transform us. They are moments when we recognize our deep connection to all of God's creation, to the Universe itself.

They are the moments when our hearts grow larger as we realize that we are loved and that our ability to love has no beginning and no ending

Many of us come to worship together on a Sunday morning in order to have just those kind of experiences. They can come from the music, the times of silence, the prayers, the readings or even, on the odd occasion, the sermon. Some of us find the sanctuary itself, with its stain-glassed windows and polished hard wood enough to fill us with a sense of inspiration or peace. For others it is the hug from a friend or the feeling of community that is our mountain peak moment.

In this week's bulletin I included a quote from Aldous Huxley that says, "My father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing." I agree that both of these options will offer up mountain peak moments, and I have to admit that I have made the choice of a walk myself on occasion. But I believe that churchgoing, as Huxley puts it, also offers other gifts such as the opportunity not only to receive but also to give, to serve, to be disciples, to be followers of Jesus in the world.

Mountain peak moments give us the strength, the courage, the faith we need to transform ourselves so that we can make a difference in the world. Those moments remind us that we not alone in our struggles, that others have felt our pain, and that the power of God's love has no boundaries. Those moments remind us that sometimes we have to let something die in order for new life to emerge. Those moments remind us that true grief can happen only after true love has been experienced.

That was the gift of that sweet voice coming from her mother's phone here in this sanctuary just two days ago. That was the gift that Jesus offered his own disciples on that mountain peak 2000 years ago. That is the gift that is available to each and every one of us as we experience our own mountain peak moments.

May all our lives be filled with these special moments. May we know the awe, the joy, the peace and love that they bring. May it be so. Amen.