



THE TRANSFIGURATION
MARCH 3, 2019
LUKE 9: 28-43A
“ON THE ROAD AGAIN”

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 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.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” 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.

The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”

“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.”

Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

Four college students are having an incredible time in Florida on spring break. They decide to spend an extra week extending their fantastic experience. One of the students calls their professor and says, “We are stuck in Daytona Beach. We won’t be able to make it back in time for exams because we blew a tire on our car and we’re having trouble getting it fixed.”

The professor says, “No problem. Your safety comes first. Do what you need to do and when you get back you can take your exam.”

So, the four of them live it up for the next week. Drinking. Partying. Having the time of their life.

When they get back to college, the professor welcomes them, sits each of them in a different room and hands them the exam.

When they turn over the paper to start writing, they find there is only one question, “Which tire?”

We could call their party time in Florida a “peak experience.”

Peak experiences were first described by the psychologist, Abraham Maslow in 1971, as especially exciting and joyous moments in life, involving sudden feelings of intense happiness and well-being, wonder and awe. They can also involve an awareness of spiritual unity or knowledge of a higher truth.

The transfiguration of Jesus is such a peak moment.

Peter, James, and John are on the mountaintop with Jesus.

And peak experiences are mountaintop experiences. We are removed from the grind of daily life. Taken into a different world—into a higher or advanced way at perceiving reality.

It is the holy man meditating alone in a cave on the mountainside.

Hikers achieving their conquest. Standing on the mountaintop, gazing at a vast, gorgeous vista.

It is skiing or snowboarding down the mountainside on a cold, sunny day in Colorado.

Peak experiences often happen in nature or in experiences of great beauty--art or music.

And Peter speaks for everyone who has experienced a peak moment: “Wow, Jesus. This is fantastic! You are glowing whiter than the Pillsbury Dough Boy or Mr. Clean. I need

to get some sunglasses. And Moses and Elijah are with you, so it's kinda like having the guardians of the galaxy right here with me. Let's build three shelters so we can stay just like this forever!"

The peak experience takes us out of the day-to-day and lifts us higher. For a moment, burdens are lifted. Anxieties ease. The clouds of depression drift away. Problems fade into the stunning sunset.

And peak experiences are necessary. But, when religious worship is dull, boring and rote; when congregations no longer work together to create exciting and uplifting events; when petty quarrels become permanent fixtures, then people look elsewhere for their peak experiences.

Religious ritual is meant to glue us back together each week so we feel better, not cause us to fall asleep in the pew....

But, there is this joyous, inflated danger with the peak experience.

Like Peter, we can want more of it and we can want more of it more of the time.

Like my client who was explaining the incredible rush of smoking crack cocaine. It didn't matter that he had wrecked his car and was now riding his bike to a job he soon lost. It didn't matter that his daughter was working in a strip club and his son recently got arrested. He was chasing that high. Looking for that peak moment that never came again.

A recovering alcoholic friend of mine said the problem drinker thinks, "if one beer is good, then twelve will be better." He used to carry out three forty-gallon bags of empty beer cans over a weekend when his wife was out of town.

How high can I get? And for how long?

Talk to problem gamblers. Oddly, winning is not the issue. It is the rush, the whole peak experience of chasing the next chance. Will I or won't I win? Either way, the whole experience happens on the mountaintop.

In the spiritual realm, we find phenomenon like speaking in tongues as a way to the peak experience.

The tent revival or the emotional born-again experience are attempts to find and remain on the mountaintop. Such conversions can, indeed, move people into a higher level of spiritual living.

Meditation and centering prayer are healthy ways to put down the daily load and rest in god in silence and peace.

I hope many of you will come to our sessions on Christian meditation and centering prayer at Faith and Family Café in the coming weeks....

Now here's something you'll want to take in and hold onto: when we study peak experiences, we discover that situations that elicit positive responses tend to produce the continuance of positive reactions. Situations that elicit negative or avoidant responses tend to produce continuance of negative reactions.

In addition, positive responses buildup stronger response patterns than negative ones. Positive responses are more intentional than negative ones.

Makes me think of the family driving home from church. Dad was complaining about just about everything. The sermon was too long, the hymns were too slow. He didn't like the new color the church had been painted.

Finally, his ten-year old son piped up from the backseat, "I thought it was pretty good for the \$2.00 you put in the plate."

Peter is actually right on target in our story this morning. The best way of having more peak experiences is by putting ourselves into an active, purposeful, positive frame of mind.

The opposite mindset—depression, apathy, fatigue, anxiety—often is the outcome of passivity. Negative passivity leads to depression.

My old priest friend, Father Zarate, used to have a wonderful response to anyone who came to him with a complaint, "the youth group is not active enough" or "we need to do more in the community".

Father Ray would reply, "Sounds like the lord is leading you to work with our youth," or "Sounds like you're being called to work with the poor."

Challenging the person to turn negative passivity into positive activity.

Isn't this why twelve step groups urge members to "Take what you can use and leave the rest." Stay positive. Build peak experiences.

So, I'd like everyone at CLC to use this as a guideline when you're planning an event, leading a group, doing anything that you do as a volunteer.

How can I make this a peak experience for other people?

Don't do something just to do it. Or to get it over with. Or to say it got done. Don't do it in the same old, worn out way.

How can I make this a peak experience for other people?

Because then we build a powerful spiritual community that transforms people's lives....

And yet, I love this story because of what comes after the peak experience.

Listen closely, "The next day, **when they came down from the mountain**, a large crowd met them. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child, a spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

We all have to come down off the mountaintop, leave the peak experience behind and face the crowd and the problems of life that may indeed be a challenge.

We gotta hit the road again, pick up our load, and get about the tasks and trials of life.

What a bummer!

In some ways I dread vacations. About five minutes after I'm back, there is more work in front of me than before I left for vacation and any pleasure and relaxation I had is completely gone.

Am I right?

So, I consider it a spiritual discipline to be able to develop some skill in alternating between the peak experiences and working to build positive responses into my daily life. Being able to put my nose to the grindstone and get 'er done.

And I think that's what Jesus is showing us this morning.

In healthy ways, cultivate your peak experiences—in this congregation, in your meditation or devotional time. In your time off, in your time in nature, in listening to music or some creative endeavor. And then become positively acclimated to getting better at your day-to-day challenges. And making peak experiences for other people.

Jesus is a little frustrated with his disciples because they have yet to grasp what they need to know to deal with the difficult situations in front of them.

But this is life. Time away on the mountaintop feeding our souls and then on the road again. Getting better at building positive responses across the board so that our lives can be a blessing to ourselves and others.

SONG: **ON THE ROAD AGAIN** BY WILLIE NELSON