

“Stripping Away”  
Sermon given 2-14-2010  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
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**FIRST LESSON: Luke 9:18-27**

*<sup>18</sup>Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” <sup>19</sup>They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” <sup>20</sup>He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” <sup>21</sup>He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, <sup>22</sup>saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” <sup>23</sup>Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup>What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? <sup>26</sup>Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. <sup>27</sup>But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”*

**GOSPEL: Luke 9:28–36 -37–43a**

*Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen listen to him!” <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. <sup>37</sup>On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” <sup>42</sup>While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup>And all were astounded at the greatness of God.*

Today’s Gospel speaks about Jesus on a mountaintop. What comes to mind when you think about mountains? Blue skies, clean air, sunshine? Many musicians have taken the mountain as a subject, like John Denver singing “Rocky Mountain High!” Mountains have come to represent many things, from getting a clearer picture of the surroundings, to a beautiful view. This week we will have a view of Whistler Mountain in British Columbia for the Olympics. Some

of you may have had mountaintop experiences in your lives that changed the direction of your lives forever. In this part of Idaho we are surrounded by mountains; from Bogus Basin to Brundage Mountain in McCall, Bald Mountain in the Wood River Valley, to the beautiful and seemingly endless mountains in central Idaho. Living in mountain country we don't have to imagine what it is like to go to the mountains, we can see them. Today I want us to group that mountain with Jesus, a mountain that some scholars suspect is Mt. Tabor, to capture a vision for your life.

Our story this morning begins with our first lesson. You really need the beginning of chapter 9 to make sense out of our Gospel. At the beginning, Jesus empowered the disciples and sent them out to exorcize, heal and preach. When they get back he feeds the 5,000. When Jesus is alone with the apostles, he asks them, "Who do they say I am?" Then he asks, "Who do you say I am?" Jesus gives his first prediction of future events, his being rejected, suffering, and being killed and raised from the dead. He invites his disciples to follow him by taking up their own cross. Eight days later.....

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went up to the mountain to pray. While praying, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white. In the Old Testament this is called a "THEOPANY"... "theo" meaning God....and "epiphany" means a revelation. Peter, James and John saw Moses and Ekijah appearing in glory, talking to Jesus about his departure. There is a "glorious" moment.

The Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop is not a "Rocky Mountain High" for Jesus. It is the purpose of his life, talking about his departure/exodus. "Mountaintop experiences" are usually in relation to the highs in our lives. When someone says, "I had a religious experience" we may think of something glorious like standing on the podium with a gold medal around your neck, hearing your national anthem play. But for Jesus, it is about being rejected, suffering, being killed, and then raised. A cloud, the presence of God, came over them, and the voice said, "This is my son, listen to him." Peter doesn't get it, he won't get it until after the resurrection. This is why he wanted to build the three booths to contain when he perceives as that "gold medal moment." As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus told the disciples to tell no one of the VISION, the things they had seen.

Our founding fathers had a vision of a future. They did not write down the past fears, or even the present fears of losing their land, lives, money, or even of their own suffering. They wrote the vision of what was ahead of them: "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." These were visions of the future for all people, not just for themselves, hope for all, and God's Glory.

This Glory, or presence of God, and the vision for our lives by God is called a "THEOSIS". This idea comes from the Eastern Orthodox theology, meaning all

that is not holy is stripped from you until you are infused with the glory and presence of God in your life. All evil is stripped away, like the layers of an onion. A "THEOSIS" happens when every fiber of your being knows the presence of God, and you see Jesus more clearly in your life. Peter, James, and John spent three years with Jesus. Yet, it wasn't until the Day of Pentecost that they had a "theosis" moment. The years with Jesus were the preparation for the moment, the vision, and the understanding of glory. It is a gradual process of seeing God more clearly in your life until you reach the fullness.

How are you different from Peter, James, and John? You, like them, think things go better with Jesus, so here you are. You would like to freeze the gold medal moments in our lives, the rocky mountain high. You struggle and stumble like the disciples who couldn't perform an exorcism. You get into arguments with one another like they did, arguments about who is the greatest among us. You are like Peter, James, and John on Easter morning at times hiding behind closed doors out of fear. We are a people, like them, for whom God gives his Glory and Vision.

We are a people who know God is present. We know God is in our lives. The power of God is at work in your life and this is a given. God calls and invites you, like he did Peter, James, and John and the others. When you hear the Benediction this morning, be attentive to the words, "The Lord bless you and keep you, make his face to shine upon you..." I want you to walk out of all that is unholy in your life and infuse it with his Glory. I want you to walk out this morning at Peter, James, and John walked down the mountain....with the experience of the Transfiguration.