Have you ever been to a place where you didn’t want to leave and wanted to stay there forever? It could be your favorite vacation spot, a beach resort or on a cruise to some remote island in the Caribbean. Or perhaps DisneyWorld, your favorite restaurant or just being in your warm and cozy bed at home. Wherever that may be, all of us have some place where we feel comfortable and homey. We would say to ourself, “Ah…this is like “Heaven” on earth! This is right where I want to be. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else in this world!”

I remember when I was about 8-9 years old, I was in Hong Kong at the time. My dad received this complimentary invitation pass for the Grand-Opening of the first ever *Chuck-n-Cheese* in Hong Kong. So he decided to take me and my sister to go on that Saturday afternoon. We received unlimited playing tokens on the arcade games, skeeballs, lived music entertainment, balloons, with lots and lots of prizes. We even got to take instant Polaroid pictures with the mascot “Chuck”. And the best part was, we got All-You-Can-Eat FREE pizza, soda and ice-cream. For a little kid, that was MY paradise. This was my dream comes true. I didn’t want to leave at all of course. But little did I know back then, that all good things must come to an end eventually. But the memory certainly lasted a lifetime and wanted to go back for more in the future…but the next time we would have to pay for everything…then it’s not so FUN anymore!!

I’m sure we all have our moments or places like this….when we’ve gotten this amazing experience and felt like we were walking on “Cloud 9”. Sooner or later, reality sinks back in and we must deal with the mountaintop experience in a melodramatic way.

This was what happened in the Gospel reading that we read earlier with Jesus and three of his closest disciples (Peter, James and John). As they were going up to the mountain to pray, the disciples noticed that Jesus’s facial complexion began to change. He appeared to be glowing and his clothes became dazzling white. What was going on here?

Was Jesus still human? Why was he turning into some spirited figure? Was this some kind of an illusion that Jesus was transfigured into? Perhaps He was not just the prophet and the rabbi that we know of. Jesus was **“*More Than Meets the Eye*”!**

Instead of panicking, those disciples realized that a Divine revelation was taking place right before the eyes when they heard a voice coming from the cloud saying, ***“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”***As you would imagine, those disciples were terrified. In the midst of all of this, they also noticed there were two other figures besides this “glowing” Jesus. They appeared to be Moses and Elijah.

Wow, this was a moment of a lifetime. How often do we get to have Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all gathered in the same place? We must be dreaming! How can this possibly be real? We need to capture and salvage this special historic moment.

“***Lord, it is good for us to be here!”*** Peter cried out. This was so awesome, Jesus! Peter wanted this good feeling and the “mountaintop experience” to last for a lifetime. Peter had this ingenious idea of building three dwellings (or booths) for each of the prophets. One for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus! So they can commemorate this special location and salvage this moment for the future.

Chances are we probably would’ve attempted to do same thing.  **Naturally we want to treasure up and salivate our precious moments.** We would like to keep things in a time-capsule and preserve for as long as it can. We take pictures and videos on our birthdays, anniversary, weddings, graduation or other important events in our lives. Who wants the party to end when everyone is having a blast, but unfortunately eventually it must! I know that some newlywed couples even freeze their wedding cakes so they can eat it later on, on their 1 year wedding anniversary! Did any of you do that?

In those Old Testament days, it was not an uncommon practice to build a shrine or an altar to commemorate the special occasion that took place there. We can’t really blame Peter for his brilliant ideas, can we? Unfortunately that was not exactly what God had in mind for us. Instead of building a dwelling or a temple up on that mountain, God wanted us to soak in the experience by planting the temple in our hearts and in other people’s lives. God’s temple is spiritual embedded in our hearts and invested in our lives. It is made evident by the fruits that it bears and not how glamorous it looks on the outside.

God took this special opportunity to reveal who Jesus truly is. He was more than what we see and know on the surface. God’s words gave a very clear rebuke to Peter’s instinct: ***“This is my beloved Son; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”*** Jesus ordered Peter to head back down the mountain into a chaotic world of people pleading for help and healing. As Jesus’s disciple, his call was to carry the memory of what he had seen and heard from this mountaintop experience, into a desperate world yearning for hope. **Ultimately this is what God wants and not what WE want! This was God’s commissioning but it is OUR calling**!

Interestingly throughout this story, it was Jesus’s appearance and identity that took center-stage. Jesus’s new transfigured appearance revealed to us who He truly was. The Heavenly voice affirmed His divinity as the Son of God…not just another prophet, like Moses or Elijah, but the One who is sent to save the world. He is the long-awaited Messiah! The question for all of us today is, **do we really know who Jesus is personally and how many times have we passed Him by or ignored Him?**

As one theologian puts it, ***“when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, he did not change from one thing into another the way the objects in Harry Potter did, or the way a caterpillar does in a cocoon into a butterfly. Rather, it was like a light shined on Jesus that showed who he truly was. No longer could his friends pretend he was just one of the guys, or even an ordinary man with a few extraordinary gifts for healing. Now Peter, James, and John could see that Jesus was closer to God than they had fully realized, and more powerful than anyone they had ever known.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

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|  | In our Old Testament passage, we read a similar passage with Moses being summoned to the mountaintop for a little “conversation” with God. Throughout history, the mountain has served as a refuge and a retreat for reconnecting with God. It is a place where one could **let go** of one’s troubles and **let God** speak to us through personal prayer, active listening and discernment. Perhaps God knew that Moses was in need of a break – a little time-off to be away from his people, some of whom may not be as supportive and resistant to his leadership over the years. Out of his obedience, Moses went.  Moses certainly did not “need” this mountaintop experience with God in order to bolster his own confidence and faith. Moses, after all, has been in continuing conversation with God since the moment of his call. The mountaintop exchanges with God were meant for the people of Israel.[[2]](#footnote-2)  Nevertheless, Moses ended up spending the next 40 days and 40 nights alone with God up in the mountain. The glory of God was shining upon his face. It was so scorching bright that the people could see that from below. As much as Moses probably had enjoyed that personal one-on-one time with God, at the end of those 40 days, God sent Moses back down the mountain with a couple of tablets of instructions (or the Ten Commandments) as we know it. These were **the gift from God, for the people of God,** re-affirming God’s faithfulness and covenant to God’s people, despite their sinfulness and disobedience against God. |  |

Moses reconnecting his relationship with God through this mountaintop experience. It felt good to be in God’s company and be walking on “Cloud 9”. Like those disciples when they were with Jesus high up on the mountain, it was a warm and fuzzy feeling that no one ever wants to leave, and neither do we. However, the mountaintop experience is not where God wants us to be. That’s not where our mission field is. Our mission field is down below where the people are, at the base of the mountain.

There are people down the mountain who are suffering and still sinning against God. They need God’s presence in their lives more so than we do. We simply cannot ignore them by retreating ourselves up in the mountain and pretend everything is fine and life goes on as usual. But things are really NOT OK. The Law and the Commandments alone were not enough, they were being ignored. That’s why Christ was sent to this world in order to redeem this sinful world.

Just like Moses and Jesus’s disciples, God intended us to get back out there and to continue the mission that God has started…to deliver God’s compassion and message of salvation to others and to lead them into the Promised Land. The Holy Spirit re-assured us through her guidance through each and every step of the way, so that others may see and experience God’s presence in their lives. When the disciples were frighten by what they saw. Jesus came over and touched them. He offered them an assurance of comfort.

Over the next 50 days during this Season of Lent, may we be invited to reflect and to examine our spiritual journey? How is our relationship with God? If Jesus were sitting beside us right now or sleeping on a bench on the subway station, would we even recognize Him at all? **Have we been so disfigured ourselves from God’s image that we’ve failed to recognize Christ altogether?**

When our spiritual lives become mundane and routine, or even non-existent, perhaps we need to accept God’s invitation once again to spend some time alone up on the mountaintop and be reconnected with Jesus?

Lent is not about what we give up for personal sacrifice but rather what we take on and how we see Christ’s presence in our world today. Ultimately the season of Lent challenges us that **it is not about us, but it is all about God.** God invites us to a period of **reconnecting our hearts with Him** once again by filtering out any personal thoughts or desires that may hinder our relationship with Him. Do we ultimately exemplify who God is, not only by our outward appearance but by Christ whom we wear on our inside?

In closing, I would like to share with you a few lines from one of the popular contemporary praise songs called, *“Shine, Jesus, Shine!”* We’re not going to sing that today, although it’s #192 in our new hymnal. I particularly like the 3rd stanza very much. It captures the essence of our message this morning. It goes like this ***“As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, so our faces display Your likeness. Ever changing from glory to glory, mirrored here may our lives tell Your story. Shine on me, Shine on me!”***

**Benediction**

As we journey through cross throughout this Lenten season, may our lives be mirrored through Christ’s likeness, transfigured into the image of God as God intended us to be, shining forth and radiating God’s glory to others. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Abby Thornton Hailey, http://d365.org/devotions/the-mighty-god-devotion-for-february-25-2014/* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Erica Brown Wood, *Feasting on the Word Year A, Volume 1,* P.437 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)