

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from February 14, 2021



Intro to the Service The beginning of Lent this Wednesday means we are ending the Epiphany Season, which always concludes with Transfiguration Sunday, when Jesus' divine nature is most clearly revealed to his closest inner circle of disciples. The only events that will make it clearer will be his resurrection and ascension. Today we will touch on an Old Testament story that probably foreshadows this event, and we will focus not only on the events themselves, but on what happens immediately after in both stories.

Opening Prayer Let's pray. Almighty God, Today, on this Transfiguration Sunday, your Son Jesus shines with your glory, and you instruct us to listen. So open our eyes to hear again of your mighty salvation, and to follow the way of life you have made possible and are still making for us each day, just as you have throughout your history with your people. In Jesus name, Amen.

Call to Worship Exodus 24:12,15-16a,18, 31:18, 32:1,7-8,15a,17-19, 25-26
(R1 Reader 1 R2 Reader 2)

R1: Listen to our call to worship which depicts our first historical story

R2: The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction." When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai.

R1: To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

R2: Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

R1: When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

R2: Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and

have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands.

R1: [His aide Joshua had been waiting for him partway up the mountain and they returned together]. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

R2: Moses replied: “It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.” When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain...

R1: Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.

R2: So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

Music Intro Moses gives us the invitation to be for the Lord, and so does our opening song...

Opening Music *Come, Now is the Time to Worship*

Theme There are often folktales about how animals gain their primary characteristics. Those stories often include a moral for life. In Brazil, beetles have such beautifully colored, hard shelled coats on their backs that they are sometimes set in pins and necklaces like precious stones. How they gained this color is explained in the folktale, *How the Brazilian Beetles Got Their Coats*.

Once upon a time, Brazilian beetles had ordinary plain brown coats. One day one of them was crawling along a wall when a big gray rat ran out of a hole. He looked down at the little beetle and said scornfully, “O ho! how slowly you crawl along. You’ll never get anywhere in the world. Just look at me and see how fast I can run.” The rat ran to the end of the wall, wheeled around and came back to where the beetle had crawled only a small distance. “Don’t you wish you could run like that?” said the gray rat to the brown beetle.

“You are surely a fast runner,” replied the beetle politely, for her mother had taught her always to be polite, and that meant never boasting about her own accomplishments. And this beetle was true. She never boasted a single boast about the things she could do. She just went on slowly crawling along the wall.

A bright green and gold parrot was perched in a mango tree over the wall and had heard the conversation. He asked the rat, “How would you like to race with the beetle? I live next door to the tailor bird. So just to make it exciting, I’ll offer a

brightly colored coat as a prize to the one who wins the race. You may choose any color you like and I'll have it made to order."

"I'd like a yellow coat with stripes like the tiger's," said the big rat looking over his shoulder at his gaunt gray sides as if he were already admiring his new coat.

"I'd like a beautiful, brightly colored new coat too," said the beetle. The rat laughed so long and loud that his gray sides shook. When he was finally able to speak, he mocked, "Why you talk as if you thought you had a chance to win the race!"

The bright green and gold parrot set the royal Palm tree at the top of the cliff as the goal. He gave the signal to start and then flew to the tree to watch the end of the race. The big gray rat ran as fast as he could up that steep hill. He thought how very tired he was getting. He said to himself, "What's the use of hurrying? That little brown beetle cannot possibly win. If I were racing with somebody who could really run, it would be very different. He started to run more slowly, but every time his heart beat it said, "Hurry up! Hurry up!" The rat thought it best to obey the little voice in his heart, so he hurried just as fast as he could.

When he reached the royal Palm tree finish line, he could not believe his eyes. Never in his life had he been so surprised. It was like a bad dream. The little Brown beetle sat quietly beside the bright green and gold parrot. Once the big gray rat was able to catch his breath from his run, he ask, "How did you ever manage to run fast enough to get here so soon?"

The beetle drew out the tiny wings from her sides and replied, "Nobody said anything about having to run to win the race, so I flew instead."

The rat said in a subdued voice, "I did not know that you could fly."

The bright green and gold parrot said, "After this, never judge anyone by looks alone. You can never tell how often or where you may find concealed wings. You have lost the prize." Turning to the beetle, the parrot asked, "What color do you want your new coat to be?"

The little brown beetle looked up at the bright green and gold parrot, and the green and gold palm trees above their heads, at the green mangoes with golden flushes on their cheeks lying on the ground under the mango trees, and at the golden sunshine upon the distant green hills. She said, "I choose a coat of green and gold."

From that day to this the Brazilian beetle has worn a coat of green with golden lights upon it. And until this day, even in Brazil, where the flowers and birds and beasts and insects has such gorgeous coloring, the rat wears a dull gray coat.

(Adapted and abridged from: Bennett, William J., editor and commentator, *The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life's Journey, How the Brazilian Beetles Got Their Coats* as Retold by Elsie Eells. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). pp 159-161.

The moral was stated within the story. Don't judge a book by its cover -- you never know what powers of flight might reside within. Today we have two Bible stories. We've already heard one. In both stories, there is glorious mountain top experience when all is seen for what it truly is... and there is also a dark valley experience in the shadow of the mountain when people misjudge the circumstances and people involved. Sometimes, we even misjudge ourselves, looking at our circumstances and who we think we are, and not realizing what and who we have inside of us, and that "the one who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4b) and it is he that can raise us up so we can fly.

Prayer Chorus # 143 (2x) *On Eagle's Wings*

Prayers

Our most powerful God, all the heavens proclaim your righteousness. During the rising of the sun to where it sets, from your beautiful heaven you call to everyone on earth. You come to us in glory and gather your covenant followers around you. You recognize our prayers and vows of worship that we fulfill. But you also remind us that you already have everything you need, for all the world belongs to you. There is nothing we can give you that you do not already own. What you really want is for us to heed your instruction; to not forget who you are when we are tempted to ignore your words and live against you and our neighbor. To wake up and reconsider when we have taken your silent graceful patience as approval for our misdeeds. Forgive us. Hear us when we call to you in days of trouble.

This week – Bill Martin has moved to CareTel in Brighton for a few weeks to recuperate, so continue to remember Bill and Jan. Both my parents have finished their treatments and are now having tests done to see results, and for one to see what more can be done, and the other, to investigate lingering symptoms. Bill Wycoff requests prayer for his friend John Cole who was in a car accident, receiving leg and head injuries and requires another surgery. There are others on our minds that we name in our hearts in this next moment of silence. **SILENCE**

Lord, the miraculous power of your Spirit has put love in our hearts to compassionately care for and meet the needs of others to the best of our ability. Receive us, our prayers, our talents, our time and energy, and what we have, as we offer ourselves to be instruments of your kingdom here on earth as you enable us to live as you taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading Mark 9:2b-10

Pastor mentioned earlier that the Epiphany season concludes today. The Epiphany season focuses on revealing who Jesus is. It began with the visit of the magi signifying God's intent was that Jesus came not only for the Jews, but for the world. Then Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. During that event heaven and earth connected. The Spirit descended and God announced his love and pleasure with his Son, which ratified the earthly ministry on which Jesus was about to embark. The disciples (and we) are called to follow and to trust where he leads. We conclude the season as we do every year, going up into the mountain to witness heaven and earth again intersect and God once again affirms Jesus as the Son who would speak for and carry out his heavenly Father's mission. An affirmation deeply needed for them, and for us, as Jesus, and we, will turn our attention toward the trek to Jerusalem and death on the cross. This is how our second historical event happened...

... Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them. As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept it to themselves, but they often asked each other what he meant by "rising from the dead." (NLT)

Music Intro And we learn from Luke (9:31) that Jesus' mountaintop conversation with Elijah and Moses was about his – most English translations use the word departure, but the word is literally exodus. Luke was connecting Jesus death, resurrection and ascending to heaven with God's primary act of salvation for the Jews. As they left the slavery of Egypt to enter the promised land through Moses, so we leave the slavery of sin and are journeying to the promised land of heaven through Jesus. And when we really take the time to think about that, all we can do

is stand amazed (and sing about) what God has done through for us through Jesus.

Hymn # 371 (vv 1,4,5) / Stand Amazed

Message “Rise Up! God is Working!” Exodus 24 ff, Mark 9:2-10, 14-29

We’ve heard two mountain stories, Mt. Sinai with Moses, and though not named, most think the transfiguration took place on Mt. Tabor. Let’s compare the essence of what happened in these two events. As we do, consider where we are in our spiritual journey, with who we identify most, and where we might find ourselves in the story.

Comparison of the Two Texts	
Exodus	Mark
God invites Moses into the mountain.	Jesus invites his closest disciples into the mountain.
Moses enters the cloud and experiences God’s glory.	Jesus is transfigured and they see God’s glory.
God prepares tablets in order for the people to listen.	God prepares Jesus in order for the people to listen (cloud)
Down below the people don’t grasp or forgot who they were following (God through Moses).	Down below the people don’t grasp or forgot who they were following (God through Jesus)
God’s people below are filled with doubt and fail to bring about God’s kingdom (idol worship) -- to their own detriment	Jesus’ disciples below are filled with doubt and fail to bring about God’s kingdom (non-healing) – to their own detriment
They are discredited – become a laughing-stock to enemies (surrounding nations)	They are discredited – become a laughing-stock to enemies (religious leaders)
God through Moses immediately begins the restoration by recalling the people to the Lord (via rallying)	God through Jesus immediately begins the restoration by healing and recalling the disciples to the Lord (via prayer (and fasting))

Let’s move deeper into the New Testament story. But before we get stuck in memorial booths seeking a permanent mountain top experience, let’s talk about what is happening down below at the base of the mountain where most of the disciples are feeling -- something very different. Knowing the competitive nature of these disciples (See, e.g., Luke 9:46, Luke 22:24ff), it wouldn’t be surprising if they were consumed with why and how they failed to make the cut to go up in the mountain with Jesus.

jealous competition, introspective examination, self-defeated depression

Bubbling to the surface may have been anger, jealousy, an ambitious

competitive spirit; an introspective self-examination on how to make the cut next time; or maybe even a self-defeated depression; feeling powerless to break into “Jesus’ inner circle”.

Of course, we aren’t told what they were busy thinking or doing when a father came asking them to heal his son who was possessed with severe symptoms. They failed. On an earlier mission trip, they had been successful in these kinds of healings, (Mark 6:13) which raises some questions. Was that power granted only for that trip? Had they drifted away from the power that had been given them? Did they get full of themselves and therefore empty of God’s power? Was this son more entrenched in his bondage than the others they were previously able to help? But more to today’s point – how do we feel now? Not only did we not get to go up the mountain, now we feel stripped of the power to make a difference in the lives of people who *need* us to make a difference.

frustration? embarrassment?

But there is more. Not only did we not get the mountaintop experience, not only did we fail to help a family in need, but a crowd has also gathered making our failure very public. Now how do we feel?

**humiliation? fear? squirming
shame under scrutinization?**

But we are still not done. Among the crowd were religious leaders who were arguing with us. These leaders were a well-trained, determined, hateful group of people who didn’t believe Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah who came to free us. They saw our failure as a great opportunity to lash out and set us and the crowd straight about who, in their opinion, Jesus was not. And here we are, simple trainees, left out of the inner circle, filling up with self-doubts, our shortcomings exposed, and fears fanned into flames by the hateful harassment of life-long experts in faith.

Are we wavering under the pressure yet? Maybe we feel a bit like the main character in *The Life of Pi*, who finds himself afloat on a raft on the high seas in the dark of night, with no rudder to steer by, and no stars for setting his course, even if he had a course to set; and soon to discover there is a hidden, hungry tiger on board. It is then that Jesus, Peter, James, and John return from the mountain. The crowd runs to Jesus in overwhelming wonder to greet him.

Jesus had heard the loud arguing in the distance, so when he arrived, he asked what it was about. The father answers about the failed healing and contentious resulting response. Jesus wonders how long he would have to put up with this unbelieving generation. About whom Jesus is speaking is not clear. Was the

unbelieving generation everyone in general, the religious leaders, his own disciples, or some combination?

Jesus requests the still sick son be brought to him, and the son immediately acts out. Jesus questions the father about his condition; and the father goes into detail about his long-term dangerously destructive behaviors, then concluded by saying, “But *if* you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

“IF you can’?” quoted Jesus.

Was this question as critically toned as the earlier one about putting up with an unbelieving generation? By quoting the man’s “IF you can,” he points out that doubt is damaging.

When doubt overtakes us,

- 1) We admit defeat before we even attempt a task.
- 2) Doubts may lead to frustration, anger, and arguing.
- 3) Doubts inhibit, if don't prohibit progress toward a vision.
- 4) Doubts prevent us from seeing a miracle being birthed in our life.
- 5) Doubts weaken our defenses and our resolve.
- 6) Doubts prohibit peace and inspires anxious worry in troubling times.

But Jesus, while pointing out the damage of doubts, seems to encourage rather than condemn the father. If judgment had been the intent, he might have added, “IF I can, go away, you don’t have enough faith for a miracle”, or “Go, muster up more faith, and then come back.”

**Everything is possible
with even a little belief.**

But instead, what Jesus adds is, “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Jesus’ words inspire the father to reach for new levels: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Jesus understands our human limitations. He is realistic about our doubts. He does not expect us to have a perfect faith. He starts where we are and uses whatever little hope we do have to do something in our lives. Matthew, at the end of this same event, records Jesus as saying, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can... move mountains... Nothing will be impossible for you.” (See Matthew 17:20) You don't have to have faith like a mountain to move mustard seeds. But if you have any faith at all, it is enough to get God's attention, his love, his care, his support, and if it his will in the big picture, it will move the hand of God to move mountains for us. We may not always understand the possibilities. We may not always see what is best for us in the bigger picture that includes and goes beyond us – but we can trust that God is

eager to work on our behalf. He casts out what truly binds us, because, with even a little belief, God will act as God chooses to act for the people, he has called to be his own. Jesus quote of the father and following words about limitless impossibilities gave to this father an opportunity to diminish his doubts and build on the faith he does have.

Desperation may birth seeds of potential belief

When the father sought Jesus, it may have been more out of desperation than out of hope. But we know some seed of faith was there -- or was reborn in him when he heard about Jesus. We know this because he bothered to bring an uncontrollable son out into public to find Jesus. When Jesus uses his "IF you can – anything is possible" as a teaching moment, the father jumps at his learning opportunity – "I do believe and help me to build my faith to overcome the doubts I do have." Growing seeds of faith and diminishing seeds of doubt is something we all need help with from time to time.

Be honest about our doubts

This father teaches us to be honest about our doubts. We don't like to admit our faith is not perfect, or as good as we think it should be, or as good we imagine someone else's is, or as good as we think others think it should be. But we cannot grow our faith by denying its weaknesses. Instead, we should take comfort. This father would not have won any awards for outstanding faith, and the disciples had to learn over and over again that they weren't as strong in their faith as they wished they were. We are in good company.

Desire to have more faith

Be honest with God about our doubts. Also included in the man's confession is a desire for more faith. To be clear -- the desire is for our growth in our faith, and our willingness to grow is not conditioned on God *first* proving himself to us on our terms. The father did not say, "Jesus, heal my son and *then* I will place my faith in you." He simply asked for help to have faith. It is when we confess our need for God to help us with our doubts that he can begin to work with and in us.

Unlearn doubting habits

Be honest with God about our doubts, desire to have more faith, and unlearn doubting habits. This man had been dealing with his son's problem for years. We can't say exactly how it had impacted him, but generally speaking, repeated disappointments and ongoing frustrations can train us to think in skeptical, even cynical ways. If we want to grow in faith, we may have to disrupt normal negative thinking patterns. As Paul says in Romans 12:20, "... be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

The story moves forward. Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene... I'm not sure how they got separated from the crowd, or if Mark just means even more crowds were coming, or if he was just wanted to remind the reader that crowds were there. Nevertheless, Jesus doesn't seem to want the additional attention and quickly heals the son by rebuking the impure spirit within him. The son convulsed badly, and it took so much out of him that when it was over; onlookers thought he had died. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

Jesus and his disciples then went indoors away from others. In this private setting that the disciples asked why they had failed. In Matthew, Jesus talked about the mustard seed of faith, which apparently, they did not yet have in that critical moment, but here in Mark, he replied with an important lesson about diminishing doubt and developing faith.

Jesus did not say: "I'm the only one who can handle this kind of situation. It is beyond you." He did not say, "If only you had said the right words" (as if it required a magical formula (of prayer) and they got it wrong). Nor did he say, "Only professionally trained people can handle things like this." What he said was, "*This kind can come out only by prayer* – and some versions add [*and fasting*]." But the essence of it is: God can work anything, but (only) through people who stay in a connected relationship with him.

Keeping in contact with God

Therefore, faith grows through a committed prayer life. Read His Word. Believe what it says.

Act upon it, (See James 2:18-20) Focus on the path and not on the problem, focus on Jesus and not the risk... and recognize that even when people approach us and ask for a miracle, it is not we who live the miraculous life, but we rise up because God is already working. In response to even a little faith, he frees, he liberates, he heals; and then Luke adds, Jesus gave him back to his father; and they were all amazed at the greatness of *God*. (Luke 9:42b-43)

That brings us back to the first half of the story – where Jesus and his inner circle were up in the mountain, where they saw physical and spiritual worlds intersect, where they saw Christ in all his full divine glory, as well as Moses and Elijah. It allows us to see just who it is we are in relationship with, in whom we are putting our faith. It is as last week's theme story of the cat and fox revealed – what is important is who you know, and today's beetle story declares – we need to know what powers are at work within us that allow us to fly.

Peter is so caught up in the moment that he isn't thinking clearly, and he asks to set up a permanent place like the tent of meeting in the Old Testament, where people communicate with God, or as the traditional booth festival that reminds us that God provides. But the mountain top is not meant to analyze, regulate, codify, institutionalize, and limit God into fixed ways and fixed places of operating. The minute we do that, it all vanishes from our grasp.

Later on, when Peter refers back to this memorable event; he doesn't say we should go up a mountain, build a booth and recreate the event so that maybe we can find that door between the physical and spiritual worlds again. Instead, he uses the memory to remind everyone Christ is already alive and well and with us and working his mission in us and in his world in constantly fresh and exciting ways.

The mountain is not there to get us out of the valley where forces and beliefs collide, where spiritual battles persist. Where tensions, disappointments, conflict and frustration and vulnerability are often a part of life. The mountain reminds us that our real, powerful and glorious God is always descending into the valley to work for us – and, perhaps, like the disciples who were already there, we need to learn rely on our own discipleship ability less, and to rely on God more, to think self-thoughts less and God-thoughts more. We do this as we continually listen to him --- as we prepare as those three disciples prepared -- for the terrors of devoted, sacrificial service that would soon lay ahead of them in their future. We may not always feel we are powerful enough for the task before us – but the mountain reminds us that we can take courage, because the power of God's grace is boundless. Believe it, rejoice in it, and take on the mission God has laid before you.... to make a meaningful difference in the needs of our own life, our homes, our church, our community, and our world.

Prayer Let's pray. Dear Lord, we've seen circumstances beyond our ability to handle, and we've seen you at work. Today you are asking us if we will we follow the pressures of people and circumstances below or the advice given in the clouds on mountains Sinai and Tabor; listening to your will because we are reminded of just who it is that we are putting our faith and following. You call us to shine with your glory, to go from the mountain into the plains and valleys, to bring rejoicing where there is suffering, to bring fellowship where there is persecution, to bring a vision of eternal life to the realities of mortality, to move from Transfiguration to Lent. You are preparing us for your work in your world -- to rescue those who are perishing, and to care for our neighbor in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Music (vv 1,3) *Rescue the Perishing*

Closing Blessing Knowing that God's light has risen upon *you*. So through you, let his light shine into a dark world by rising up to live kingdom values and daring to serve Jesus in new and adventurous ways. Amen.