

Season of Creation - Mountain  
September 30, 2018  
Is. 65:17-25; Ps. 48:1-11; Rom. 8:28-39; Mark 16:14-18

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## God of the Mountain

Grace to you and peace from our loving God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is Mountain Sunday, the final Sunday of our third year's Season of Creation. So, what to say about mountains...

What comes immediately to mind when I think about what we can learn from mountains is a simple little souvenir that Marie and I found at Volcanoes National Park in Hawaii. That was very fortunately several months prior to the eruptions of Kilauea, the lava from which has now covered many of the places we walked.

We purchased a few of those souvenirs for friends. They are refrigerator magnets with a picture of a volcano and the words "Advice from a volcano" at the top. Here's the advice:

- Stay active.
- Keep your inner fire burning.
- It's okay to let off steam.
- Go with the flow.
- Have a blast!

No. These cute little lessons are not particularly relevant to scripture. But they do say something about how contemplation of various aspects of this amazing world can yield insights that have spiritual application.

So, let's play a bit more with this theme of mountains--with reference to scripture and see where it might lead—just in case those few bits of advice from volcanoes isn't enough.

Before us this morning are passages that those who organized the Season of Creation a couple of decades ago chose very intentionally for this Mountain Sunday.

Isaiah 65 sounds a lot like Revelation, doesn't it? We studied chapter 21 last Tuesday in our Book of Faith session. That bit of Revelation begins: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." Something tells me that John of Patmos had Isaiah at hand when he penned those phrases. But the intention of including these sentiments on Mountain Sunday is clear. The holy hill of Jerusalem, also known as Mount Zion, will be transformed by the recreating spirit of God. Here's Isaiah:

“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

The mountain upon which the ancient temple was built, and the city that surrounds it, will yet be a holy place, where abuse and grief are things of the past, where infant mortality is a distant memory, where people are not snatched from life before having reached a certain age, where people dwell in good houses and fields yield well their produce, and indeed where enmity between and among creatures no longer holds.

It is a glorious vision of what Revelation calls the new Jerusalem, a restoration for which we may yearn. And more to the point of this day—a restoration for which we are called to dedicate our lives, our strength, our will, and our resources.

Paul, in Romans, reassures us that such a vision is possible. All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose. And what is this purpose? Perhaps you recall the most fundamental purpose of human beings from my sermon two Sundays ago.

Just in case you don’t, here’s a reminder. Based on our look at Genesis and Philippians and Mark, we learned that we were made to serve and preserve the Earth. Let me emphasize that a bit:

- The mountains and the Earth are not primarily gifts to us. We are gifts to them.
- The mountains and the Earth are not made for us. We are made for them.
- The Earth was not created for us. We were created for the Earth.
- God did not create the Earth for human beings. Human beings were created to serve and preserve the Earth.

Our calling, our vocation, and our fundamental purpose as creations/creatures of God is to take care of what God has made. This is a new insight for me. And I believe it to be among the most profound of insights available to us in all of scripture.

And the gospel—it speaks of another aspect of our calling: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” Notice here that it does not say “people” or “creatures.” The word can be well translated as “cosmos.” Go into all the cosmos, into every corner and niche of creation, and proclaim the good news. That good news, simply put, is that God is for us and not against us, that God loves us with an abiding love, and that God in Christ shows us the way of loving service to people and creatures and all of creation.

So, why Mountain Sunday? Well, mountains in scripture tend to represent the powerful presence of God among us. Mountains are the places where ancients thought of God as residing. And mountains in scripture are sources of life and healing. They are holy.

Mountains have often held significance for religions of the world. Who among us doesn't know of Mount Olympus from which the Greek gods ruled? Mountains also fill the biblical narratives. Such images were understood not only as the home of the gods, but also as a kind of cosmic umbilical cord that joined the heavens to the Earth.

Henry David Thoreau invested spiritual currency in the wilds. John Muir wrote widely about mountains ("The Mountains of California") and identifies human health, vitality, and religious meaning with sensitive immersion in mountain wildernesses. Backpackers, hikers, and mountain climbers still seek, as they attempt to get away from what they perceive to be the superficialities of modern society, experiences of a more authentic engagement with Earth and its vitalities. We even speak of deep spiritual events as "mountaintop experiences."

Of course, all of creation is holy. And mountains, as spiritually significant places—of life and revelation and healing—are also holy. Here's a bit of a thumbnail sketch of how special they are in the bible:

- It was on a mountain, Sinai or Horeb, that the first most powerful revelation of who God is and what God has made us for came to us (the Ten Revelations Into the Mind of God). In the Ten Commandments we are called to honor God, respect parents, take time for rest, and treat creation with care (avoiding misuse of others or abuse based on jealousy or desire)
- It was on a mountain that the temple was situated—Mount Zion in Jerusalem—the first house built for God and place for the worship of Yahweh.
- It was on a mountain that Jesus was tempted to turn away from his mission.
- It was on a mountain that Jesus revealed the precious elucidation of God's will for us and our relationships—the Sermon on the Mount, in which the humble, merciful, peaceful, and pure in heart are lifted up and blessed.
- It was on a mountain that 5,000 and more were fed.
- It was on a mountain that our Lord's glory was revealed to a few of his closest followers; he was transfigured before them and brought into the company of Moses and Elijah, the great prophets.
- It was on a mountain—of olives—that Jesus struggled and prayed as he faced his final days.
- It was on the Calvary Mount on which our Lord humbled himself, even to the point of death on a cross. For us and for all creation.
- It was on a mountain, in Matthew's gospel, that he commissioned his disciples with the great task of taking the gospel into all the world. Mark's version of that commission stands before us this morning in our gospel as a call to all creation.

From mountains issue forth life and healing and salvation. As I have often said, when you're reading scripture and a mountain gets mentioned, perk up your ears for something highly significant is about to occur.

Mountains are majestic. They rumble with earthquakes. They spew fire and lava and smoke. They are filled with power and they inspire awe in us. The picture on the front of the bulletin is a good example. I can't tell you how many pictures of mountains I have taken. I can't fully express the depths of soul-reeling response I have experienced when in awe of mountains—from Crater Lake to the Canadian Rockies to Denali to the volcanoes of Hawaii. There is something about mountains that moves us, that fills us with wonder, and that humbles us. We grasp something of our insignificance in the face of the forces that shape them and the resulting rugged beauty of mountains. They lift up our eyes—do you hear the Psalm? “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and Earth.” (121)

Any yet, we are schizophrenic as a culture with regard to mountains. We are more than willing to treat mountains as more a source of raw materials than as a means of spiritual enlightenment. From clearcutting trees to mountaintop removal, we abuse our holy hills. Even as scientists are clear that most of the fossil fuel reserves in the world need to stay in the ground if we have any chance whatsoever of keeping our atmosphere from the catastrophic warming of more than two degrees Celsius.

And so, we seek to learn today the lessons of the mountains, not only the advice from volcanoes. We seek to renew within us the awe for the majesty of these great places of beauty and peace, as well as of struggle and violence. We need to renew our hope, as fueled by Isaiah and Paul, to engage our calling as proclaimers of the gospel and renewers of the Earth. For nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord as we preach good news to the mountains and to the cosmos.

So, dear friends and fellow members of the Body of Christ, we have work to do. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to it. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord unto abundant and eternal life. Amen.