

Mountaintop Moments

Pastor Dave Shackle
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This morning we gather to hear the Word of the Holy One, celebrate Holy Communion, and say "Holy Moses!" at the milestone 100th birthdays of two of our members. It's also Black History Month, *and* the sixth Sunday of the Epiphany Season. So, in searching for a unifying topic for this multi-themed gathering, I realized I might need an epiphany of my own. And then it came to me, like a view from the mountaintop. Throughout history, *mountaintops* have provided inspiration and awe to humankind. Whether we're standing below, raising our sights; or atop, marveling at the breath-taking panoramic view - mountaintops literally and figuratively invite you and me to consider Life from a different perspective.

Today I'd like us to consider two things that people of faith receive from what we might call "mountaintop experiences". The first are *Life Lessons*; and the second are *Hopeful Visions*. It was from the mountaintop that Moses brought the Hebrew people the commandments for their living together as a community. These initial commandments covered the basics for their life together. They were to recognize and honor *one* God. They were to respect the sanctity of Life; respect the relationships and property of others; treat all people with fairly; and be truthful and honest in dealing with one another. Essentially, that was it!

As time passed, however, these basic Life Lessons devolved into thousands of heavy-handed rules, rituals, and regulations - rules which often favored the powerful and the rich, while burdening the poor and powerless. Jesus comes to re-balance the scales of justice, and to reclaim the compassionate heart of the Holy Teachings. Like Moses before him, Jesus goes up the mountain, where he once again conveys the Divine Intention to bless and protect the poor, the meek, and those who suffer and mourn. He calls those who hunger and thirst for righteousness "blessed", just as he blesses and feeds the physically hungry. He teaches that the merciful will receive mercy, and that the pure in heart will see the Holy One. Peacemakers will be recognized as true children of the Holy One; and those who suffer because they stand-up and do what is right, are welcomed members of the Divine Realm.

Jesus stands-out in a long line of teachers and prophets who were persecuted for "righteousness sake" - for insisting that the Divine Desire is that all people be treated rightly and fairly, compassionately and equally. For many of us today, Martin Luther King, Jr. is another shining example of one who stood firm in the face of persecution and adversity. In spite of the blatant bigotry of his day, King maintained a Hopeful Vision of a world where love and equality, unity and peace would ultimately prevail. In spite of bitter and often brutal opposition; in the face of death itself, King was able to see beyond the way things were, and envision the way things could be. And because of that Hopeful Vision, he willingly gave his all to strive for that more perfect world.

On the night before he was killed, Martin Luther King spoke these powerful and profound words: "The world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land.... But I know that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.... We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.... And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

Unlike Martin Luther King, Moses was well advanced in years when he stood on the mountaintop and saw the Promised Land. Like King, Moses will not enter that land; but he knows that his people will. And that's enough for Moses. He has lived a long and remarkable life. And he has been given a Hopeful Vision of the promise and potential of a better life yet to come. The good news is, that our Divine Source continues to provide these Hopeful Visions to you and me today. And with these Visions, the Holy One also continues to work with *us* and through *us* to make them a living reality. The Divine Spirit who inspires and empowers Jesus to overcome the forces of fear and hatred, provides you and the power to do the same - to make a positive difference in our world and in the lives of those around us.

Throughout this world, and within us all, and, there is a Sacred Power and Presence which is *a/ways* there, though sometimes we just can't see it or sense it. That's why it is so important for us to remember and to emulate the lives of those who envision Life's grandest and noblest possibilities. People like Moses and Jesus and Martin Luther King. People like Jeanne Cowden and Bill Tonneff, and all those wise and wonderful people who teach us those important Life Lessons, and who pass-on those Hopeful Visions of Divine love and justice, unity and Peace. these are the Lessons and Visions that you and I, in turn, can convey to those who will follow.