



**February 29, 2009**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

Mark 9:2-9

## “Moving Down and Out”

“Stick with me, baby, and I’ll take you all the way to the top!”

This phrase is one my husband has used playfully through the years—whenever we encounter financial challenges! It’s his wry way of trying to lighten the mood in the midst of job loss or unexpected expenses.

We use many expressions about “moving up”:

- “movin’ on up...” from the TV show “The Jeffersons”
- moving up in the world
- upwardly mobile
- climbing the ladder to success

“Moving up” is generally seen as a GOOD THING. We even refer to powerful moments in our spiritual lives as “mountain top experiences”.

These aren’t always exotic or remarkable—sometimes they are ordinary moments that become revelatory. A mountaintop experience could be something that confirms a sense of direction in your life; a moment when you feel “called” in a vivid way.

This could happen when you teach a Sunday School class for the first time, and find delight in relating to the middle schoolers.

It could happen while coaching 4 and 5 year olds as they learn to play soccer.

It could happen as you sing a solo in your church, or when you are cast for a part in your school's fall play.

Other moments lift us so high with joy and pride:

- Gazing into the eyes of your newborn child or grandchild-
- Beaming with love, joy and pride as your son or daughter speaks marriage vows-
- Finding the way to reconcile a broken relationship-
- Sharing deep conversation and treasured memories with an aging parent-

There are, of course, LITERAL “mountaintop” experiences. Standing in the midst of the beauty and magnificence of a mountain peak seems to hush every human who attains that height. I always feel so close to the power and presence of God. This is one reason why I love skiing, camping, hiking. Even standing at the top of a good-sized HILL in the Midwest brings me close to the Lord I love. Nature, in general, “lifts us up”. Even in the flatland where I grew up in the state of Nebraska there is a VASTNESS that seems to act like the HEIGHT of the mountains.

In today's Scripture, Jesus, Peter, James and John **moved up** to the **top of a mountain**. Their experience there identified Christ as unique and connected to an unseen world beyond our own. The presence of Moses and Elijah reveal Jesus' connection to the God and the teachings present in Hebrew faith and Scripture. He is the fulfillment of both the Law (represented by Moses) and the Prophets (represented by Elijah).

This short passage presents us with two truths:

1) Mountaintop experiences where the light of God's glory shines brightly are IMPORTANT—and we need to PAY ATTENTION to the messages God brings to us through them;

AND

2) Life is not lived on the mountain top. God always tells us to move down and out, to serve the God who has been revealed to us by reaching out to others.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain—or at least build structures that would remain and remind people of what had happened there. Rev. Leonard Sweet suggests how the disciples may have been thinking: “Once Peter, James and John spread the word about this transforming event, people would flock to the site, a mega-movement would result, and Jesus' mission would become a great success.”

Jesus knew what they were thinking, and told them to keep quiet about what they had seen until the time came later for them to proclaim it to all. He didn't tell them to FORGET ABOUT IT, or to BRUSH IT OFF as insignificant. He knew they would be deeply affected, and wanted them to embrace the truth of what was revealed to them. BUT THEY WEREN'T TO USE ANY OF IT FOR AGGRANDIZEMENT or PROFIT. The "success" they had in mind isn't success at all, to Christ.

Jesus calls us to give up our ladders to success. He calls us to move down and out in service to others in his name. We don't really get anywhere special when we stick with the world's view of "moving up in the world". The old time movie star, Mae West, used to talk about people who climbed the ladder of success "wrong by wrong". This is a real temptation for all of us.

According to the world, "successes" are those things that can be calculated, calibrated, counted up. But serving others is never quantified. The point of serving is to offer yourself without counting the cost or tallying the results. In Jesus' "parable of the sower" he speaks only about our responsibility to "sow", to be out in the world sharing what God has given us and done for us. It is God's responsibility to reap. We are called to plant seeds. We will be judged on the sincerity of our sowing.

Jesus rejected the world's "success scenarios" completely. There is really no such thing as 'failure' or "success" for Jesus. "Failure" and "success" are the devils inventions and intentions. Jesus never worried about struggling up or slipping down any ladder. Jesus was concerned only with lowering himself toward those in need and extending himself forward into God's service.

As we move down from the mountain top, and follow Jesus into the world where we serve him by reaching out to others, we ARE blessed; we experience a KIND of success, but it is different than what the world calls success. Here are just a few examples:

#### SUCCESS MEANS

- giving yourself away to others and receiving back more than you could imagine
- experiencing the power and presence of God when two or three are gathered in Christ's name
- learning it's more blessed to give than to receive
- seeing yourself as God sees you
- putting God first in your life
- trusting the Holy Spirit

- taking up your cross daily to follow Jesus
- celebrating the person God is making of you

Can we do this? Can we do both of the things this Scripture teaches us to do?

Can we recognize God's light in the moments of our lives—shining on us, revealing his truth in the midst of what look like ordinary experiences, but what are really MOUNTAIN TOP MOMENTS? Pay attention! See you if you can recognize one this very week. Keep a notepad by your bedside table—and before you turn out the light at the end of the day, think over your experiences. Was God shining his light on some truth he wants you to recognize? CLAIM THOSE MOMENTS. Learn from them. Value them.

Can we also move forward with the inspiration of those moments REACHING OUT to others in love and service? Mark on your notepad each night any times you reached out to another with the love and grace and truth of God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus is here this morning calling to us—Will we take his hand? Will you move with him down into the hurting world to reach out with his grace? I pray it might be so. Amen.