

A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE

Mark 9:2-9 Text vs. 6 **“He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.”**

Julie Andrews gifted us with a thrilling moment of movie making in the opening scene of *The Sound of Music*. Atop a peaceful Austrian hill surrounded by majestic mountains stands Maria, portrayed by the incomparable Julie Andrews. The camera draws closer. The music swells. The hills echo the joyous strains of music. The grass seems to sway in rhythm as if nature itself was conducting a symphony. The moment becomes magical when Julie Andrews, her eyes open with wonder spins with arms outstretched, her voice soaring like a lark and begins to sing the immortal song, “The hills are alive with the sound of music....”

What is it about mountain tops? What is it that attracts us to them? Most people have a special feeling for mountains when driving through North Carolina, West Virginia, and Tennessee. We talk of having a "Mountain Top Experience". What is it that makes an experience like that so special? Is it because you feel being on a mountaintop puts you closer to God? Is it feeling separated from the world by the ruggedness of the mountain? Does the majesty of the surroundings remind you that your place in this world was made by God. Is it when you're standing on a mountain top looking out and it seems you are seeing forever? Or is it when you look down seeing the world laid out before you and realize just how small your part in the world really is.

Well, whatever it is, mountain tops have always played an important part in the human spirit. Whether it's in the Celtic world standing inside stone circles. Or seeing carvings in rock caves dating from before the time of written records? Ancient stones and tombs have always been placed to look to the stars and capture moments of cosmic importance. The Hindu holy man sitting alone on a mountain meditating day and night. Or Mount Nebo, a place of religious historical and spiritual significance standing 4,000 feet above the Dead Sea on the east side of the Jordan River opposite the city of Jericho with a breathtaking view. It's where Moses viewed the Promised Land before his death. And Mount Moriah is where God tested Abraham's faith. At a designated place Abraham would make a sacrificial offering to God. Abraham prepared the altar and then bound his son Isaac who asked his father where was the lamb for the sacrifice. Abraham replied, **“God will provide for Himself the lamb”**. Just as Abraham raised the knife to sacrifice his son, the angel of the Lord called out to prevent him from harming Isaac. A ram caught in a thicket nearby became the substitute sacrifice, which reveals God's ultimate provision—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Abraham's unwavering faith. And God's intervention, reveal deep truths about sacrifice, redemption, and Jesus as the Lamb of God. Mount Moriah is a powerful testament to faith, sacrifice, and divine providence.

But Mt. Sinai is where Moses first met God. It's where Abraham's obedience and God's mercy met. It's where the Ten Commandments were given. And it's where Moses had a glimpse of God as He passed by.

Then, Elijah was fleeing from the wrath of Queen Jezebel. One of the most controversial and wicked women of her time, she controlled powerful men around her, including her husband King Ahab of Israel. She promoted the worship of false gods. Especially the god Baal. In a dramatic showdown, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a test of their gods' power. And after Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal, he fled into the wilderness of Sinai exhausted and disheartened where he sought refuge in a cave at Mount Horeb, which is Mount Sinai, asking for support and reassurance that God was still with him.

And here we are. In our lesson today, Jesus is on a mountain, Mount Tabor. It rises like a dome from the Plain of Jezreel eleven miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee, and five miles east of Nazareth, and stands 1,500 ft. above the Jezreel Valley plain in Lower Galilee. Many battles have been fought around it. It's mentioned as one of the key mountains in Scripture. Jesus' inner circle, Peter, James, and John are with Him as He leads them up that mountain to a place where they were all alone. And it's while they were there Mark, our Gospel writer tells us, that Elijah and Moses appeared, and were talking with Jesus. Then, **“a cloud enveloped them, and a voice from heaven declared, 'This is my beloved Son; listen to Him!'”** (Mt. 9:7)

Did you hear that? God called Jesus His Son! His beloved Son! That means it wasn't just a close relationship. There was a deep affection. And it's what adds heartbreak to the sacrifice God made in offering Jesus' life for our sins. It meant Jesus wasn't just a prophet or a teacher. He was God's Son! Uniquely connected to His Father by The Holy Trinity, which was clearly present in that sacred event. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit appeared as a glorious cloud, indicating the Divine Presence. It emphasized Jesus' distinct identity.

It's here, in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus was transfigured before them that an important moment occurred! Jesus' face began to shine. His clothes became dazzling white. It was a display of the Glory of God in Jesus! The shining face. It's like the change that came over Moses when he had been speaking to God in the Tabernacle during the Exodus. The bright clothes. They're a sign of purity. And of God's glory. It's like the description of God's angels in various places throughout the Bible. Those three disciples were being given a brief glimpse of a heavenly reality beyond their human experience! A hint of the true nature of Jesus whom they had only recently proclaimed to be Messiah.

And now, this happened, immediately after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and Jesus' explanation of His purpose for coming to die on the cross and rise again after three days. As the cross approached where God's beloved Son would suffer for our redemption, those three disciples had the privilege of witnessing Jesus' radiant transformation. On that mountaintop, His divine glory was revealed and left a lasting mark on their faith, and an understanding of who He was. Then Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John not to reveal what they had just witnessed. He didn't command them not to tell anyone what they had seen. He wanted them not to tell anyone YET. It happened frequently. Jesus would teach His "inner circle" something they were not to announce until later. **"These things I have told you, that when the time comes, (that is, His resurrection and His ascension) you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you."** (John 16:4)

It's easy to understand why sometimes Jesus told people to remain silent. His miracles could be seen as sensationalism and could hinder His ministry. So, He occasionally took steps not to tell anybody. And there's nothing "strange" about that. It was simply a matter of judgment. His command to keep silent was a deliberate move to protect His ministry. To emphasize His spiritual healing. To prepare His disciples for the challenges that were ahead for them. However, as they were about to come down from the mountain Peter suggested building three shelters up there on the mountain. Why? Well, he may have recognized what had just happened made a connection to the observance of Israel's Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). During the Feast, Jews would build temporary tents for shelter to remember God's provision during their journey from Egypt in the desert during the Exodus. There was anticipation in seeing the Promised Land. So, by suggesting three shelters be built up there, Peter could have wanted to create a sacred place for this extraordinary meeting. The appearance of Moses and Elijah in the presence of Jesus might have felt like a divine festival. And the shelters? They could symbolize reverence for it. Peter might have wanted to extend that wonderful experience he just witnessed of Jesus being transfigured. Shining in radiant glory alongside Moses and Elijah. It was a moment of divine revelation.

Moses had died on Mount Nebo at the age of 120. And Elijah didn't die in the usual sense. He had been taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire while his disciple Elisha watched. A powerful moment—a testament to God's sovereignty and His unique relationship with His faithful servant. And those three shelters could have been an attempt to keep that sacred moment alive. But it also revealed Peter's bewilderment. He was puzzled. Seeing Jesus alongside Moses the lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet was overwhelming. By proposing to build three tents—one for each figure—Moses, Elijah, and Jesus—Peter may have been connecting Jesus with those respected historical figures. It was respectful. But misguided.

Peter's desire to build three shelters showed in a mixture of reverence that he had tried to honor the moment unfolding before his very eyes - Jesus' transfiguration confirming His identity as the Son of God. And Peter's response was both wonder and human weakness. In reality, **"Peter did not know what to say. They were so frightened."** (Mark 9:6) So, how do you deal with something that's frightening? Something that's complex and confusing in your life? Like when something, or someone, confuses you and you don't quite understand. Something your doctor said. Or didn't say? Something your husband, wife or child did. Something happened between you and your neighbor. Do you try solving it on your own? Or do you rely on the advice of God? You see, mountains can be moved! Problems can be solved.

In Matthew 17, Jesus had just come down from Mount Tabor after being transfigured when a man approached Him seeking help for his demon-possessed son. The disciples had tried to heal the boy, but failed. Jesus criticized the disciples for their lack of faith. He explained that even the tiniest bit of faith—a mustard seed's worth—can accomplish wonderful things. "Mountains" are obstacles you face in your life. Jesus wasn't talking about faith as a magical power. He was emphasizing trust in God. Faith isn't about getting up a lot of willpower. It's about relying on God's strength. When you cling fast to God, obstacles that seemed insurmountable suddenly become surmountable. The impossible becomes possible!

While Jesus could potentially move real mountains, the important lesson here is about the power of faith. Even a small amount of genuine faith can have remarkable results. The contrast between a mustard seed and a mountain draws attention to the vast difference in size. Faith, no matter how small, can accomplish mountain-sized results. So, when you talk about "faith moving mountains," it's not about physically relocating geological features. It's about overcoming challenges. It's about trusting God. It's about seeing the impossible become possible. The idea of moving mountains inspires hope. The notion that mountains can be moved has fascinated the human imagination for centuries. While you may not physically be able to relocate a mountain, your efforts, your determination, your belief in God, can change the landscape of your life and the world around you. Mountain top experiences are wonderful. But the test is, when you come back down into the real world, and you get back to reality in a broken and hurtful world. Whether it's a personal struggle. A worldwide crisis. A significant shift in a changing society. Differing worldviews and economics. World power shifts reacting to historical events. Technological advancements. Human weaknesses. In all of it, God's Glory can sometimes be hidden. So, the test is for you to remember, trust what you discovered up on your mountain top. Believe everything's possible.

Remember last week when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He emphasized the importance of praying that God's will be done. That daily needs be met. To pray for forgiveness and protection from evil. But prayer's not just about

asking for things. It's about listening to God. Prayer is seeking guidance and wisdom from God. If you believe in Jesus, He's far more powerful than anything you could ever imagine. That's what the disciples took with them down from that mountain top. And it's what you need to constantly remind yourself - Jesus goes far beyond anything you may have ever hoped for. He is the Son of God! He is the second person of the Trinity. Everything is possible for Him. And everything is possible through Him, and by Him. That makes everything possible for you, if you're joined together with Him through faith. So don't be frightened of what's ahead. Let go of what's behind. Live your life in the present. And praise His Holy name. For His is a name far above every other name. His name is Jesus. Trust Him. And you will have your mountaintop experience, with the Son of God. AMEN