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Newark, Delaware
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“CATCHING LIFE’S RHYTHMS”

Matthew: 17:1-9, 14-18

Lent begins this Wednesday -- we celebrate with Ash
Wednesday.

During Lent we gather with Christians from around the world
making a journey to Jerusalem...

A journey to the cross and resurrection dawn.

And on the journey we experience the promise and dangers,
The joys and sorrows,
The heights and depths
That come in our living.

Those ups and downs are a part of life.
This morning we're up on the mountaintop.
And then plunged down into the valley.

That is life's rhythm... do you catch the beat?

On the mountain ... a splendid moment when we seem to wake
from a deep sleep ...
and know we're standing in the presence of God.

It's an overpowering, humbling, moment of clarity and renewal.

And the rhythm continues ...

Down into the valley, with work to be done, and others to be
attended to, and heartbreak ...
the perspiration of committed, frustrated people,
hoping people -
- and the desperate and hopeless.

“...Look -- my son -- convulsions seize my boy and dash him to
the ground.”

“Help me! “Help my son!”

Do you catch the rhythm?

Up on the mountain --
 Hopes fulfilled
 Prayers answered.
 Closeness and
 Unity and joy...
 The sweet, exciting thrill of being with God.

But then the rhythm modulates –
 “This is my son -- my chosen one -- listen to Him.”

And we are in the valley
 With confusion
 Everything up in the air
 Questions
 Sickness
 Alienation,
 Doubt -- Anger --

“Jesus, even your disciples couldn’t help my son.”

And so the beat goes on -- back and forth -- up and down ...

From the mountain to the valley
 From unity to division
 From harmony to discord
 From inspiration to despair.
 From faith to doubt.

And Peter, James and John, with Jesus, experience it all --
 All the ups and downs
 All the fascinating rhythms

AND I HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE THAT, TOO –
 HOW ABOUT YOU?

It’s the old, old story of God meeting-up with men and women.

This story is my story, for I find the high points of my life mixed in
 with the low.

Times of illumination followed by darkness and trial.

Times when I seem to have it all together ...

But then moving to division and discord.

Experiences of the mountain top followed by the nitty-gritty,
sobering experiences life brings -

“Look at my son -- his convulsions dash him to the
ground.

“Do something! “Good God, do something!”

What have been your mountain-top experiences?

Moments of clarity and brilliance?

Moments when the presence of God enlightened you?

Moments when you glimpsed that God is involved in your
life FOR GOOD.

... and FOR SURE?

Friends, that mountain-top experience was so precious to the
disciples.

Certainly they had been shattered by Jesus' statement
that he was going to Jerusalem to die --

And that death loomed for them, too, if they remained
faithful to the journey.

They were bewildered

Their hearts breaking --

...BUT WHAT HAPPENED ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP?

WELL, IT IS A MYSTERY.

DON'T TRY TO REDUCE IT TO WORDS. --

THE EXPERIENCE SHATTERS ALL

EXPLANATION.

IT CALLS FOR HOLY IMAGINATION.

BUT THE EXPERIENCE WAS ENOUGH TO LET JESUS'
FOLLOWERS KNOW THAT God is still in charge -- and that they
-- with Jesus, were living within the center of God's will.

And so they would continue on to Jerusalem -- in hope -- knowing
that the glorious/awesome God was working-out God's purposes.

Certainly God is in this place! -----

... So let's build three booths --
 A booth for Moses -- one for Elijah
 (THOSE TWO REVERED OLD-TIMERS OF
 THE FAITH)
 And one for Jesus.

LET'S HOLD-ON TO THESE MOMENTS FOREVER.

LET'S KEEP THE SPIRIT -- THE FEELINGS ALIVE.

YES, IT'S TOUGH TO GO DOWN OFF THE
 MOUNTAIN.

We know what's down there --
 The hassle -- and confusion -- and doubt -- problems
 with the children
 And with the in-laws -- people competing for our
 attention -- or ignoring us.
 A convulsing society -- and death.

LET'S STAY ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP!

YES, let's build three booths -- or a temple -- or a church.

Let's take up residence in the midst of these good feelings -- let's
 hold on to them.

But look, Jesus will have none of that.

He walks down off the mountain, down into the valley

It's like he has a sense of purpose,
 As though he senses deep need in the valley
 A sick boy in convulsions
 And a distraught father

Master, look at my son --
 HE'S MY ONLY CHILD.
 I IMPLORE YOU!

What does the valley hold for you?

The depths

The trouble

The fear

The test ...

Convulsion -- doubt -- loneliness?

THE AMAZING FACT IS THIS:

THE AWESOME REALITY IS THIS --

EVEN IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH ...

I WILL FEAR NO EVIL --

I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.

FOR GOD IS WITH ME."

In the Apostles' Creed, Christians for generations have affirmed --

"HE DESCENDED INTO HELL."

That at least means that Christ knows us in the depths --

When life appears to have run-out,

When all seems lost -- when all is lost,

When the earth convulses around us and

The very foundations of our life

are shaken --

CHRIST IS PRESENT

THE LORD IS AT HAND.

Listen -- it is fine -- awesome -- to have those experiences
on the mountaintop --

In those defining moments of clarity we recognize how
great God is ...

that God claims us for himself --

and for the world.

CHRIST IS THERE -- "THIS IS MY BELOVED...

LISTEN."

But don't fear the journey into the valley --

Don't despair thinking --or even knowing -- that you spend most of
your life in the valley.

But the living Christ goes with us
 Preceded us into the valley --
 Meets us in the valley,

AND STANDS BY OUR SIDE!
 AND WALKS BY OUR SIDE -- FOREVER.

There are some valuable scriptures that can help us live through
 the valleys:

I am persuaded that neither life nor death
 Nor things present nor things to come
 Nor height or depth or anything else in all creation will be able
 to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

In God's hands are the deep places of the earth, the valleys are
 God's. God made them.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will
 fear no evil -- God is with me.

BUILD BOOTHS? STAY ON THE MOUNTAIN?
 TRY TO MAINTAIN A SPIRITUAL HIGH?

Alas, THE LIVING CHRIST WILL NOT LET US.
 CHRIST IS ALREADY MOVING INTO THE VALLEY

...SO BE MET BY HIM THERE.

Perhaps that's what Isaiah had in mind when he sang --

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall
 be made low: and the crooked made straight,
 and the rough places plain:

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
 and all flesh shall see it together:
 for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it. (Isaiah 40)

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH, PEACE,
 GOOD WILL TO ALL.
 AMEN.

