

Lord, it is good for us to be here today in your house. Open our hearts to hear your Words and bless our worship. Amen.

¹² The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.”

¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear People of God,

Quite a few years ago, my family and I were out in Colorado and we had the chance to drive to the top of Pike’s Peak. Once we got to the top of the mountain, the view was fantastic. But the journey up that mountain was a little frightening. You see, at that time, there were no guard rails on the side of the road and the road wasn’t all that great because it was not paved the last 5 miles or so to the top. Just gravel and sand. It wasn’t too bad until you met someone coming down the mountain and you had to pull closer to the edge. After we made it down from the mountain that day, I thought to myself, “The next time, we’ll take the train to the top.”

In our lessons for today we have a tale of two mountains: Mount Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration. Both are covered in God’s glory and yet there is a big difference. Mount Sinai at times brought fear into the hearts of the people because we associate Mount Sinai with God’s Law while the Mount of Transfiguration shines with God’s grace and we see Jesus atop that mountain. As we prepare ourselves for the Lenten season, let’s take a closer look at the story behind these two mountains.

I. “When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai.” The cloud was a symbol of God’s presence on this mountain and the glory of the LORD was present as well. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 elders went up on the mountain and saw the Lord and then the Lord invited Moses to come to him alone. What a privilege for Moses to be invited by God to receive the stone tablets that God himself inscribed with his commandments for the people. The glory of God was there to encourage and strengthen Moses as the leader of God’s people. Moses did not know what the future would bring but God did and he knew that Moses needed these 40 days of strengthening with the LORD.

The sight on the Mount of Transfiguration had some similarities with Mount Sinai. There we have the glory of God visible in Jesus as his face and clothes shine with an overwhelming brilliance. There is a cloud indicating the presence of God and Moses is there as well. And Jesus took his disciples up on this mountain to prepare them for what was coming – to let them see his glory and power to help them through the days to come when he would be crucified and die. The transfiguration was also for the benefit of Jesus as Peter later wrote, **“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” ¹⁸ We ourselves heard**

this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.” (2 Peter 1:17-18).

As we think about these two mountains lets go back to Moses and the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai and look at the significance of this event to the people. At this time God was establishing a covenant with them – follow my Law and commands and I will take care of you. In other words, you will be my people and I will be your God. The people responded to God by saying, **“Everything the Lord has said, we will do.”** (Exodus 24:3). That is what was in their hearts but their mind did not always agree with their heart. Human logic and the influences of the world had a huge impact on God’s people and they often rejected God’s Law and commands. When that happened, they brought trouble and sorrow into their lives.

Application: We are God’s people and have God’s Law and commands for his New Testament church. There are many times where we pick and choose which commands we want to obey or just ignore God’s Word all together. Like the Children of Israel, through our own disobedience to God’s Word, we often bring trouble into our own lives. Just as children think they know so much more than their parents, we think we know better than God. That’s when we bring trouble and sorrow into our own lives and we wonder why we are so frazzled and overwhelmed.

At those times we especially need God’s Word to calm our hearts – to calm our heart by bringing us the assurance of forgiveness for our failure to obey. To calm our heart by assuring us that we can do all things through him who gives us strength – in other words he will help us endure and persevere through our problems. We rely on him to give us strength and to guide us through his Word. And as God’s people, we need the Law of Mount Sinai but we also need to see the glory displayed on these two mountains; especially as it points us to Jesus and God’s grace.

II. Some might say that God’s grace wasn’t present on Mount Sinai because that is where God gave his people the Law. Some might say God’s grace wasn’t present because, **“To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.”** We know that the purpose of the Law wasn’t to bring salvation, but to call people to repentance and then to guide them in Christian living. But God’s grace was present on Mount Sinai because he did not bring judgment on the men who went up on the mountain and were in his presence. God’s grace was present on Mount Sinai as God appointed Moses as the mediator between him and the Children of Israel. There would be many times when Moses would plead for the people – intercede with God on their behalf and God would hear their cry for mercy. But one greater than Moses would come and that takes us to the second mountain – a mountain that seems to shine greater with God’s grace.

The glory of Christ was evident to the disciples now, to remind them in the future when Christ in all humility would go to the cross, that he would do so as God’s Son – willingly suffering and dying for the sins of the world. Moses and Elijah were there to encourage Jesus about his impending departure – his suffering and death in Jerusalem which would not be easy as Satan painfully “strikes his heel.” But the greatest evidence of God’s grace on this mountain is when the Father spoke from the cloud, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** God the Father was acknowledging that everything Jesus had done was

according to his plan for our salvation and he was well pleased with his Son as he prepared to complete his mission.

In these words we see God's grace for us, in that he sent his Son to be our substitute so that through faith and trust in Christ we have forgiveness for our sins and life everlasting and God was pleased to do this for us. That is why Peter's words on the mountain that day are so fitting for us too.

“Lord it is good to be here.” Peter, James and John were there with Jesus, God's Son, and Moses and Elijah – those great saints of the Old Testament. Wouldn't it be great to have Jesus and some of the great patriarchs of the church appear before us today right here in the front of church? Wouldn't that be encouraging?

It is so easy to forget that when we come to church we are in the presence of our Savior and saints too. Jesus said, **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** (Matthew 18:20). He is with us now, speaking to us through his Word and encouraging us. And while we don't have Moses and Elijah, never forget that we are all saints of God through faith in Christ Jesus, so as we gather around God's Word we are surrounded by saints, once again to encourage each other.

It is so easy to let the words of the liturgy and psalms and hymns and lessons float right by us without paying them much attention, **“But these words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you might have life in his name,”** (John 20:31). We gather together today and every week because of God's grace

God's grace is what brought the people of the Old Testament salvation through faith in the Savior who was to come and God's grace brings us salvation through the Savior who has come. Moses went up on Mount Sinai so God could prepare him for leading the Children of Israel – prepare him for what was to come in his life. Jesus took his disciples up on the mountain to prepare them for what was about to happen in their lives – to prepare them to serve as his apostles in the church. Jesus comes to us here in worship to prepare us for what is to come in our lives as we try to live our lives for him.

He encourages us through his Word – stories like this tale of two mountains: where we see the glory of God displayed and where we see his grace shining forth. So take these words to heart – let them encourage you and strengthen you for the days to come, just as they have done for God's people throughout the years. Amen.