

A MOUNTAIN KISS  
[written in oral form]

2 Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9  
Transfiguration Sunday, Year B

February 11, 2018  
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In 1981, while backpacking in Jasper National Park's Tonquin Valley, I had the glorious experience of climbing to the top of a mountain. Old Horn mountain would not be considered, by experts, to be a challenging mountain to climb. But, I wasn't an expert.

We know mountains are big, but they are much bigger than they look from the valley. Climbing is a purging experience. Crisscrossing and avoiding snow fields was exhausting, but the view while resting was great motivation. All the mountains looked bigger with a level gaze--looking straight at them. Then at the peak, dozens, maybe over a 100 mountains could be seen, and the sensation at the top was awe inspiring. I didn't expect the total silence, even though the wind was blowing. Wind without obstacle doesn't make a sound. I will never forget that experience.

Nevertheless, there are countless ways to have a mountain top experience, such as listening to Beethoven's 9th symphony.

The 9<sup>th</sup> symphony begins with a wakeup call, then slowly and gently teaches a new way of being / a new language / a new melody. The second movement presents the vision / the goal as it moves onward in the process of honing and refining the listener. At times the music soothes and nurtures, as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, but always ..the inspiration is moving ahead, moving upward – pulling upward.

*It is a bit like the Gospel message.*

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And, then there is the 4<sup>th</sup> movement that glides in with tender arms, and holds onto you as it pulls and heaves you above mediocrity – with a gasp of the mountain top view ..... the goal.

This masterpiece is drawing the listener to a higher place / to a new way of responding to life.

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Soon the tender arms flex as the brass section thrusts the spirit to engage / to open up / to dig a little deeper..... to start climbing upward.

The roll of the kettle drums.....introduces the baritone.....> ..who calls you to tear open the shroud that covers your heart.....

The transfiguration..... has begun..... Higher and higher you go.....

Then there's a pause to catch your breath..... and then more, and more, and more, as if reaching, grabbing and pulling rock by rock to the top.

Suddenly, the entire choir joins in – clearing the clouds from the peak. The summit can be seen, and tears are beckoning to be free.

Yet again, there's another reprieve. Perhaps, it is one last opportunity for the weak to surrender. And then,..... and then..... you swear you hear angels..... There is a sense of rolling / pulsating deep groaning..... You are so close...

Something is happening – It must be transformation. The world is looking different,.....and it feels like it is more than can be held. ... Astutely, there is moment of relief – to ponder / to absorb.....and to hear solemn questions echoing about.

And, then again the divine surge erupts, grabs and springs you to near the top..... it is almost too much..... AND then the bottom falls out.

Just when you're caressing ecstasy, Beethoven kicks in the turbo.

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*The entire symphony is written in D minor. At this point, it feels very normal.*

*BUT, at the end.....when you think you are THERE..... Beethoven switches into D MAJOR – the fulfillment / the wholeness opens up a new horizon.*

\*The effect .... catapults you to where the eagles soar..... to the peak.

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Listening to Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> symphony is one way to have a mountain top experience. And, with every "mountain top experience"..... the divine is involved, in some manner.

There are many ways to have a mountain top experience. And, a mountain top experience is when you transcend / see BEYOND / above the fray and distractions. It is when God feels closer, and when we better understand ourselves... and others.

It is a holy moment; – moment of awe and ecstasy, and it is an humbling experience. \* Life is never the same afterwards.

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Elijah was taken away by a chariot of fire during a mountain top experience..... He thought it was his journey, alone, but his successor, **Elisha**, insisted on going with him. And, they both had a mountain top experience.

For Elisha, it was his inaugural as Elijah's replacement.

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What we call the transfiguration, was a mountain top experience for Jesus. Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus.... They were "present"; however, ...the EXPERIENCE.... wasn't fully present with them.

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They saw Jesus' clothes turn dazzling white, and they saw him conversing with Moses and Elijah. But, the ordeal was confusing, even terrifying for them / they couldn't make sense of it, and so responded in the mundane by being reflexive and practical, evidenced by them suggesting that they construct some tents for the guests.

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They did see the cloud and heard the voice, but it wasn't theirs to experience. It was Jesus' mountain top experience. The transfiguration was an uplifting occasion to affirm, strengthen and encourage **Jesus** for what lay ahead. It was for a reason.

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But note: We **merchants of mediocrity** usually tend to focus on the supernatural, the unusual / abnormal things of such events, such as the chariots of fire..... or the brilliant white clothes. And, no doubt, since chlorine bleach wasn't invented until 1785, dazzling white clothes would have been impressive for Peter, James and John.

*The Sun alone just can't quite bleach cloth **dazzling** white.*

Nevertheless, we must not let the supernatural / the unusual side effects prevent us from embracing the experience / from beholding the new and miraculous perception.

We must NOT overlook what it is that propels us to the top / what it is that is part of the divine encounter.

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A mountain top experience is transforming. On "the" mountain, we see things and life differently. Moreover, the experience is an invitation to change, and to cast off old layers of understanding life.

Instead of being blinded by the trees in the valley / instead of being blinded by bigotry, stereotypes and the fears from being unable to clearly see, on the top of the mountain we can really see.

People in the shadows tend to focus on what isn't there / what "may be" lurking in the darkness.

From God's point of view, ... from up on the mountain, situations /... life comes into the full spectrum,... and we see that **grace is a prism.**

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We see that honour, courage, loyalty and freedom have nothing to do with war. The pristine beauty of forgiveness, justice and peace shines clearly.

From the summit, God's creation is a reflection of God,... and not a resource to exploit. And, we see that it is a lie to declare that the economy will suffer if we nurture and protect God's creation. It won't suffer, but only change.

From the mountain, we recognize that marriage— a loving commitment by two people to each other, is a wonderful thing, regardless of the gender of the two. A loving, covenant relationship is indeed divine.

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The mountain top experience changes us / transforms us; however, I want to dwell on the touch – one aspect that finally **lifts** us / gets us to that point.

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ONE of many ways that **lifts up**, so as to experience the Mt. top IS ..... PRAISE.  
PRAISE

In the swirling of Jesus' transfiguration came praise from God the Father. They were powerful words of acknowledgment, pride and approval.

*Anytime a father praises a son..... it is Powerful and uplifting, and can be life changing.  
Anytime a parent praises a child.... it is powerful and uplifting, and can be life changing.*

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And, God the father said to the Son, and I'm sure with a big smile, "This is my son .... THIS IS MY SON..... .... listen to him.

This was said publicly, which makes it even more profound.  
And, this wasn't the first time that God praised God's son. Recall Jesus baptism, where God radiantly declared, "This is my beloved Son... in whom I am well pleased."

POWERFUL.

The baptism launched Jesus ministry.  
The transfiguration.... began the really challenging part.  
Praise was necessary,.. **and needed.**  
*Praise gets us going and keeps us going.*

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In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings passage there is praise, too. This time from a different perspective. It is praise reaching up and not just lifting up. It is praise from the less powerful/ the apprentice to the master.

Elisha's devotion to stay with Elijah is an implied praise, but then, picking up in verse 9, Elijah pauses near the end of their journey, and asks Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."

Elisha answers, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

Elisha ...double underlines ..his respect and devotion to Elijah.  
He is praising Elijah by saying, "I think so highly of you that I want to be as you, and I need double your spirit to accomplish that."

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It is wonderful to praise a master / a leader, or *to Christ* by saying  
"I want to follow you and I want to be as you."

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And after that praise, they both, Elijah and Elisha had a mountain top experience.

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Praise lifts us up! Praise will lift others up **and** the one doing the praising.  
Both types of praise: Giving praise to those more powerful ..... and the granting of praise to those less powerful  
Both ways..... lifts both persons.

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Studies have shown that we can endure more stress and hardship if we receive more affirmation and encouragement– PRAISE.

Remember that the next time someone faces surgery, exams, a stressful work situation, a life transition or whatever..... And remember that for just surviving the day to day.

\*\*\* We NEED to grant and receive MORE PRAISE!

\* And, it doesn't have to be anchored to an achievement.

**Did you hear that?** Praise doesn't have to be anchored to an achievement. Indeed,.... praise is best when it is NOT earned.

God didn't say, "Way to go Jesus, great job walking on the water."  
NO..... God simply said, "This is MY SON, listen to him. I have confidence in him."

Moreover, the Baptism was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry—Jesus hadn't really done much up to that point, and the father still praised him, saying, "This is my BELOVED SON..... with whom I am well pleased."

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\*\*\*Fathers..... Mothers..... PRAISE YOUR CHILDREN!

And, Children..... Praise your parents! You'll be surprise how it lifts you up, too.  
DO IT ...JUST BECAUSE..... for the sake of love.  
Give praise for just being.....  
Praise to help lift up!

Grant **and** receive praise.  
And, try very hard not to connect it to an evaluation or a judgment.  
Try not to say, "Well, good job getting a B, but if you studied harder you could have gotten an A."

Praise doesn't give advice. Praise empowers.

Moreover, Praise needs to be honest, sincere and not an exaggeration.  
And, don't neglect "written praise."

A "hard copy" / something on paper can be cherished again and again,..which keeps the praise alive.

*I have a box at home where I keep all the thank you notes and praise notes that I have received. When I'm feeling down and over stressed,..... I pull that box out and reread those notes.*

Praise can help lift us out of a valley..... **it is that powerful.**

In addition, Praise is a form of peacemaking too – praise is positive/ it builds up and doesn't tear down; it creates, and it doesn't make enemies.  
**Praise is powerful!**

And, it is NEVER too late to praise

Parents ..... children..... did you hear that?  
Wives..... husbands..... did you hear that?  
It's never too late to grant praise..... to lift up!

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Everyone needs praise and recognition, *but few people make the need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father:*  
*"Let's play darts, and each time I throw, you say 'Wonderful.'"*

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C.S. Lewis commented on praising, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise does not merely express, BUT completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed.”

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Let us cease to live in the shadows.  
Let us end perpetuating the mediocrity.  
Let us Praise each other and God.

Especially praise, those who are broken, hurting, bitter or depressed.

Praise those below, those above and those around you.  
Praise the children, the parents, the boss and the workers.....  
Praise God and praise the sinners..... Praise each other.... *we all need to get out of the valley.....* We all need help on our journey upward.

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The Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was not an easy man to serve under—he was reserved and rarely gave compliments. Yet, even Wellington realized that his methods left something to be desired. In his old age, a young lady asked him what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. Wellington thought for a moment, then replied. “I’d give more praise.”

Praise is a blessing.  
Praise helps us up the mountain and it is part of the mountain top experience.

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I’ll end with this story.  
[http://lfze.hu/en/notable-alumni/-/asset\\_publisher/fLQ9RSuRgn0e/content/foldes-andor/10192](http://lfze.hu/en/notable-alumni/-/asset_publisher/fLQ9RSuRgn0e/content/foldes-andor/10192)

Hungarian pianist, Andor [Ander] Foldes died in 1992 at the age of 79. When he was seventy-two, he told how praise, early in his career, made all the difference for him.

His first recollection of an affirming word was at age seven when his father kissed him and thanked him for helping in the garden. He remembered it over six decades later, as though it were yesterday.

But, the account of another kiss that changed his life says a great deal about our inner need for affirmation / to be blessed.

At age sixteen, living in Budapest, Foldes was already a skilled pianist. But, he was at his personal all-time low because of a conflict with his piano teacher. In the midst of that very troubled year, however, one of the most renowned pianists of the day came to the city to perform.

Emil von Sauer [Sayer] was not only famous because of his abilities at the piano, but he could also claim the distinction of being the last surviving pupil of Franz Liszt.

Sauer [Sayer] requested that young Foldes play for him. Foldes obliged the master with some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann.

When he finished, Sauer [Sayer] walked over to him, didn't comment on his playing, but instead just kissed him on the forehead.

“My Son,” he said, “when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, ‘Take good care of this kiss – it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.’ I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, and now I give it to you.”

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The Moment we first understood grace..... was the moment God kissed you and me on the forehead.

NOW, PASS IT ON.

\*\*You are God's child..... You are wonderful. .... You are loved..... God is proud of you.

NOW -- PASS IT ON.