Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Epiphany VII
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

If you haven't been to the mountain top or had a mountain top experience before, today, Jesus takes us to the mountain top. The mountain top is that one unique place where you can see the world not as it is but how it is designed to be-a place of shared stories of compassion, harmony and love, a place where you are considered worthy enough to see the glory of God. To be at the mountain top is in itself a privilege and honor, and the experience of transformation at the mountain top is designed to unveil, expose and open our eyes to see life other than what we're used to.

For the ancient Israelite, the mountain was special because they could see on the horizon how the mountain married the heavens and the earth. The mountain top was considered to be holy-that was God's dwelling place. Moses first experienced God at the mountain top while he was tending the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law. There he saw a burning bush that didn't consume. Throughout the walk from slavery into freedom, Moses consulted with God at the mountain top. At the end of his life, the same Moses would be taken to the top of the mountain where God will show him the vast land of milk and honey which he promised the people of Israel. Moses himself wouldn't get there with the people but at least from the mountain top, he saw the footprints of God's faithfulness.

In his last speech, Dr. Martin Luther King will invoke Moses' mountain top experience and in a prophetic way, assure African Americans and the vast majority of Americans that he wouldn't get to the Promised Land with us, but from the top of the mountain, he also has seen the footprints of God's faithfulness. Footprints of deliverance. Footprints of freedom. Footprints of healing. Footprints of God's redeeming love.

As mystifying as the mountain top is, our problem is that we choose to live in valleys and are shaped by the character of life in the valley. The mission of Moses, the prophets, Jesus and even Dr. King, has been to help us look beyond life in the valley. The life in the valley can be joyous but it is fraught with the demons of sickness, bigotry, faithlessness, tragedy, misogyny, racism, acrimony, mistrust, war and sin. Life in the valley is messy, often very messy. The messiness of life in the valley often clouds our judgement.

The toll of life in the valley makes us convince ourselves that we walk in the valley by ourselves and for ourselves alone. There's a streak of indifference that comes with life in the valley. Life in the valley is about the survival of the fittest, and so you and I have to employ any tactic to more than survive, but to get ahead.

In the valley, we encounter our own demons and that of others, but on the mountain top, we encounter an almighty God whose footprints of deliverance rescues us from any and all demons of the valley.

Ever heard of this cliché before, life is not fair. Yes, life isn't fair when you live in the valley. There is no justice in the valley nor is there any fairness because there's little to no devotion to God in the valley. In the Old Testament story, we read about the journey of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was a devoted servant of God who had made quite an impression on his mentee Elisha.

From Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan and beyond, Elijah consistently asked Elisha to stay behind. But Elisha's devotion to Elijah was such that he could not heed his teacher's word to stay behind especially when he knew his master would be taken from him.

The learner in Elisha not only persisted in following his teacher, but he intended to pick up from where his teacher left off. And when he finally got the chance to make a request of his teacher, Elisha requested not money or power-two important crowns of life in the valley, but only a double portion of his master's spirit. He knew what life in the valley can become, and so to overcome that life, he needed a double portion of Elijah's spirit. It is as if Elisha was making the point that like his teacher, if he is to be successful in his devotion to God, if he is to be successful in his worship of God, if you and I are to be successful in our devotion and worship of God, we would also need a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Life may be messy and unfair in the valley, but it doesn't have to remain messy and unfair. The double portion of God's spirit is in fact what we need to make right the wrongs in the valley.

On the mountain top where Peter, James and John saw Moses and Elijah with Jesus, we see the two pillars of our faith, Moses and Elijah converge in Jesus-the Messiah, who reminds us of the good news of our value to God.

In the valley, however, we find those for whom the message of the gospel faces its significant challenge-they are those who have not found the light of the gospel. Paul likens those people to the ancient Jews who could not look at the face of Moses. In that story, Moses had to wear a veil in their presence because they could not deal with the full force of God's glory which shown in his face.

Indeed, we may not be able to deal with the full force of God's glory, not because we live in the valley but because the gods of the world have blinded our minds that we find it difficult to believe that we are worthy, worthy to the point where God through His son Jesus Christ would save us from the valley. And that is the good news of the gospel which Paul revealed to the people of Corinth. That they are worthy of the blood of the lamb that was slain, you also are worthy of that blood.

For Paul then, if you live in the valley, you would think that the message of the good news is about a God who is being manifested to us as wealth and power. But no. The glory of the good news which has been revealed to us is one where we proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as slaves for his sake. And the power of the slave lies in the proclamation of a gospel which frees all. Those who are slaves to the gospel for the sake of Christ Jesus, stand at the mountain top, they have a unique view of what life in Christ should be, what the world should be, and like Elisha, they refuse to stop following their teacher, they refuse to stop changing the world, their sole desire as slaves is to tell the old story of Jesus and his love.

Today is Valentine's Day. I remember when I first received a Valentine's Day card. In fact, I received three cards from the same person. I was the only student in the entire boarding school of over a thousand students who received three cards. I was on top of the world, it felt like being at the mountain top. That's how it feels when you see yourself worthy of someone else's love.

I am convinced of one thing; the purpose of God's revelation of Himself to you is for you to know your worth, your value to God. It is for you to know that you do not have to live in the valley. It is for you to behold the glory of God, to feel your own darkness transformed by the radiance of God's light, to feel your life turned right-side up, to feel the dew drops of salvation on your face and on your tongue, to know that you are worthy of being saved from the valley is beyond words, it is to be on the mountain top.

Believe me, you belong to the mountain top just so you can embrace your worth before God, you belong to the mountain top just so you can see the world as it should be. You belong to the mountain top, just so you can see the footprints of God's redeeming love. Amen.