

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: The High Mountain, The Holy Mountain**

#### **Lesson: Matthew 17:1-9**

*17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." <sup>8</sup> When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

**(Slide 1)** My parents loved mountains. Whenever they had time, they would go hiking. When I was a child, I often followed them and climbed the mountains with them. I do not remember exactly when that picture was taken, but the photo you see was probably from one of those times when I hiked with my parents as a child. I am standing with my mother, and my father took the picture.

As I continued to follow my parents to the mountains, something changed when I reached my teenage years. I do not know why, but at that time I completely lost interest in mountains. Instead of climbing with my parents, I preferred to let them go by themselves while I stayed home and played video games.

I think it was during my high school years. I was preparing for college entrance exams and studying for the SAT, and I was under a lot of stress. As the days of stress and tension continued, there were moments when worry and anxiety about the SAT suddenly overwhelmed me so much that I could not do anything. Near our neighborhood there was a small mountain. Normally, when my father suggested that we go hiking, I always refused. But for some reason, at that time, I decided to follow him and go.

As I stepped away from my daily routine of going only between school, home, and the library, and began to walk in nature, breathing in the smell of trees, leaves, and damp soil, and looking at the clear sky, I could feel the stress that had paralyzed me slowly begin to loosen. When I stood at the top of that small mountain and looked down at the place where I lived, the cars passing by, the buildings, everything on the ground seemed so small. As some of you may know, cell phones do not work very well on mountains. For a short time, I was free from the busyness of the world. I was able to organize my thoughts and rest.

If you are not very familiar with mountains and do not know what it feels like to look down at the world from above, I would say it is somewhat similar to looking out of an airplane window. Of course, it is not exactly the same. When you hike, you sweat, you exercise, your stress is released, and when you reach the top, you feel a sense of accomplishment and refreshment. So it is different from simply sitting in an airplane. But if mountains are not familiar to you, the feeling of looking down from the top can be somewhat similar.

**(Slide 2)** I began today with a story about mountains because Jesus also went up a mountain with His disciples, and Moses also went up a mountain and experienced the glory of the Lord. Throughout the Bible, mountains appear often. Important figures in Scripture go up mountains and experience the glory and grace of God. Therefore, beyond being just a geographical location, a mountain represents a space set apart from daily life—a holy place where one encounters and experiences God.

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany and also called Transfiguration Sunday. We often pay special attention to Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter because they are connected with well-known holidays. But sometimes we may overlook the importance of Epiphany. However, Epiphany is a precious invitation for us to meditate and reflect on why Jesus came to this earth, how He came, and who He is.

During this season of Epiphany, Jesus continues to reveal to His disciples—and to us—who He is. Finally, He is transfigured before His disciples and

shows them clearly who He is. In that sense, Transfiguration Sunday can be seen as the climax of Epiphany.

**(Slide 3)** Jesus took Peter, John, and James up a high mountain to pray. We do not know the exact time of day, but Jesus often spent the daytime healing people, teaching and training His disciples. Then, while others were sleeping at night or early dawn, He would stay awake alone and have deep fellowship with God through prayer. Considering this pattern of His life, it is very likely that Jesus went up the mountain with His disciples in the late evening or early morning. And as He was praying deeply, His appearance was changed.

His face shone brightly, lighting up the darkness. Moses and Elijah, who were highly respected and celebrated prophets among the people of that time, appeared and were talking with Jesus about His departure, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

When they saw this amazing scene, Peter probably thought that following Jesus had been the best decision of his life. At the same time, he must have felt fear. He had no regret about following Jesus. Perhaps he also dreamed of a successful life as he followed Him.

Because of that, without hesitation, Peter said to Jesus that he would build three shelters for them so they could remain in that glorious and wonderful moment. In the middle of that overwhelming scene, he kept speaking without fully understanding what he was saying. Then a bright cloud covered them, and a voice said, “This is my beloved Son; I am pleased with Him. Listen to Him.”

Through this, Peter and the other disciples heard clearly who Jesus was. This scene was a great comfort from God to the disciples, because soon Jesus would have to come down from the high mountain into the intense world where people struggled to live, and He would suffer on the cross. Before the path of suffering, God showed them in advance the reality of glory. It was a message of hope: “Though now you walk the path of suffering, in the end this shining glory will be yours.”

Friends, our time of worship is like that mountain experience. After a week of intense and tiring life in the world, God shines His light upon your faces

through this worship. It is as if He says, “Take courage, my son, my daughter. Your end is not the cross, but this glorious light.” The Lord speaks to us in this way today.

**(Slide 4)** Beginning this Wednesday, we start the long forty-day journey of Lent. I would like to say that Lent is the spiritual mountain we are called to climb together.

Lent is not simply a time to be sad or to practice self-denial. It is a time to lay down the unnecessary burdens of our lives on the plain and, looking only to the Lord, take one step at a time toward the top of the mountain. Just as climbing a mountain makes us out of breath and causes us to sweat, the journey of Lent can also be difficult. We must let go of our pride and own ways, and bring our wounds before the Lord.

But friends, just as only those who climb the mountain can breathe the fresh air at the summit, those who faithfully climb the mountain of Lent will fully enjoy the brilliant glory that the disciples experienced on the morning of resurrection. During this Lenten season, I encourage you to create a small mountain of prayer in your daily life. Even just ten minutes a day—spend that time alone with God, staying in the cloud with Him.

Let me conclude. Peter loved the mountain so much that he wanted to remain there. But Jesus took the disciples by the hand and led them back down the mountain. The glory on the mountain was not given so they could stay there comfortably, but so they could receive strength to endure the difficult life below.

Friends, your lives—lived faithfully as you have cultivated this land through the years—are already like holy mountains in the sight of God. On this Transfiguration Sunday, receive deeply into your hearts the light that the Lord has shone upon you. And carry that light back down to your homes, your workplaces, and your communities.

To the neighbors you meet below the mountain, may you share “the light of Jesus you met on the mountain” through your peaceful smiles and patient lives. This Lent, let us walk together with joy toward that mountain of glory. The Lord is with us. Amen.