

**“Faith of Law and Prophets”**  
**Sermon by Rev. Tom Warren, Pastor**  
**Peace United Church of Christ**  
**February 7, 2016**

I told all of the people on our trip to Cuba that it is best to sit for 2-3 weeks upon your experience and think about it for a while, so that is what I am going to do. I am not going to begin this morning in Cuba, but I am going to begin this morning in Montana.

The story about Montana is about my summer in Glacier National Park. It was the summer of 1986, when I worked out in the park. One of the things we did on our day off in Glacier Park, as you can imagine, was hike. One of the people I met there who worked among the students at the resort where we worked (St. Mary's Lodge & Resort on the eastern side of the park) was one of my friends whose name is Tim. Tim was from Pittsburgh. Tim and I decided we were going to hike up Mt. Reynolds. Mt. Reynolds in Glacier Park is sitting there looking at you “24/7” from elevation of 9,124 feet. It is a big mountain. We decided we would spend the day hiking up Mt. Reynolds.

Tim was quite an avid hiker. He was strong. He was kind of a little guy, but he was strong and just sort of hiked fast and went up the mountain pretty quickly. It was one of those hikes that did not require crampons. It did not require ropes as some of the hills in Glacier Park would. This one was a trail that we could walk up fairly easily, though it was steep. At any rate, we made it up to the top of Mt. Reynolds, and when we got to the top, I rejoiced at the time we would have on top of Mt. Reynolds to look around on what turned out to be a beautiful day, to enjoy the other peaks in the distance (Many of them were snow covered.), and to eat our lunch. I had brought along a book by the name of “Walden” by Henry David Thoreau. This was going to be a few hours of just spiritual sustenance for my soul on top of Mt. Reynolds.

We sat down, opened up our backpacks, and we ate lunch; then as we sat there, I noticed that someone in my peripheral vision was standing there, backpack on. I looked and it was my friend, Tim. He was ready to go! He was almost pacing. I asked “What are you doing Tim?” He said “Well, come on. Let's go back down.” I said, “It just took us 2-1/2 hours to get up here. Aren't we going to linger awhile?” He said “Well, you can linger, but I'm going back down”. I wasn't going to stay up there alone because the weather could change rapidly, so I went down with Tim, a little annoyed. Twenty-Two minutes on top of Mt. Reynolds just didn't cut it for me.

Today's story, The Transfiguration, is about mountain climbing, as was the story that Sue read about Moses going up on the mountain to meet God to get The Commandments. Everyone who goes up on the mountain has this moment when they are blazing in this glow of white light. It is this incredible encounter with God on the mountain. Jesus, of course, took Peter and John and James. When he gets up there, he finds out in the story that Moses and Elijah are standing there. Moses, of course, is symbolic of the law. Moses was the one who got the law from God on Mt. Sinai. Moses is the one who gets the “blue prints”, if you will, of how to build a new society in the wake of Pharaoh's society which the Israelites were slaves underneath. Moses has this new idea about how to construct a new community in the wake of slavery.

Elijah represents a story of the Prophets. This is the Prophets who give God's word, who remind us about how we are to live, who speak out words of judgment, who speak out words of a reminder that this new community that God has put us in charge of to build is to be a society of justice, fairness and righteousness, so on this mountaintop experience with Jesus you've got the blueprints for a new society, and you've got the voice who reminds us in the scripture of what we are called to do. What we believe as Christians is that in Jesus is the embodiment of it all. It is the kingdom fulfilled. Some

called Jesus the “new Moses”. Some called him a “Prophet”. He is, of course, both and everything else.

It is this image of going to the mountaintop that is a metaphor of sorts for having a spiritual encounter with God. It is a place where we need to go. It is a place where we need not stay too long, nevertheless it is a place we need to go, to the mountaintop. We need to also go down into the valley, down from the mountain, where human suffering and need await us, as are disciples to build that community to help people who are suffering.

In the story of The Transfiguration, we have a little different take on a common statement of our culture. You have probably heard the phrase that says “Don’t just stand there. Do something”. In the United Church of Christ, in Protestant churches, Christians are very good at the doing. In fact, our denomination has a bumper sticker that says “To believe is to care. To care is to do”, and in our tradition we have a long, wonderful tradition and history of doing, and sometimes we get caught up in doing so much that we find ourselves exhausted spiritually and even physically in doing.

In The Transfiguration story this morning, it is a different thing. It is not “Don’t just stand there. Do something”. It is “Don’t just do something. Stand there”...stand there...be with God...be in silence...spend time with the spirit. Don’t be anxious to go and do because we first have to have our tanks filled with the spirit. Don’t just do something. Stand there. Open yourself to God’s spirit. Present yourself to God and say “God, I am here. I need You in my life. I need You to heal my wounds, to give me renewed strength to live this faith You called me to” because the Christian faith is not only an awesome faith, but it is filled with awesome work for us to do, so this message is about taking time out to just stand there with God.

If you are like me, you have nervous energy. You are more at peace being busy even if it is with meaningless tasks. You are more at peace being busy than just standing there and so, finally, the silence, finding time to pray, finding time and making time to read the Bible, to be with God in whatever way it is that you are with God is sometimes hard for us to do, but The Transfiguration story, for at least a moment, calls us to stand there—stand there with God, stand there with the law, with God’s word, stand there with the Prophets and ask “What are those Prophets saying to my life? What are they calling me to do? I’ve got to understand that first and stand there with Christ”. It’s not just about believing things about Jesus. It is about finding ways to be in communion with Jesus.

We need food. We need spiritual food for the long haul, and Christian faith is not really about instant gratification, as our world is. It is about being on that long journey—the journey that has mountaintops and deep valleys, and it is about making sure our tanks are full of the spirit so that we can do the work that is placed before us. We are not simply to be navel gazers who are those who get caught up only in spirituality and never go anywhere else with their faith. We are reminded today to take time out. Perhaps it is a wonderful message as we prepare for Lent, to take time out to think about our lives, to recharge the batteries of our faith so that we can walk to the cross and so we can be transformed by the resurrection that is to come.

Today is a reminder simply that there are moments in life when our faith journey requires us to be still, to take time out to be with God and to be renewed. Thanks be to God. Amen.