



Sermon from 02/03/2008

Coming Down the Mountain Texts: Psalm 99 and Mark 9:14-29

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“Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man”
Francis Bacon

We are a culture that thrives on “the high.”

It’s part of the reason there are long lines at King’s Island during the summer.

Everyone (well almost everyone) wants to get on those heart-pounding, pulse-quickenning rides—the greater the rush; the more intense, and extreme the experience, the better!

While having exhilarating experiences that make our ears pop and our stomach do flip-flops can occasionally be fun and enjoyable, always being on the hunt for the next thrill can make for unbalanced and unhappy people.

Although our culture would have us believe that intense personal experiences lead us to salvation, they do not.

Christians know better than to give in to the cheap, thrill seeking of our culture.

On my TV I can watch outtakes of police videos where cops, having pulled someone over, are innocently shot—and you can watch that officer fight for his life—right from the comfort of my own living room chair.

From my desk, I can turn on the Internet and I can watch suicides, beheadings, and tortures—but I don’t.

Last week’s horrific and violent act is this week’s ho-hum, new-found boredom.

Bored, bored, bored.

Give us more speed, greater velocity and micro-size my technology, but jumbo-size my fries!

Our culture, my friends—as if you didn’t know—is insatiably curious for the next new thing, afraid of intimacy, pathetically bored, won’t sit still, and reluctant to commit to anything that takes longer than a week.

So what message might we believers bring to our full-throttle, open-throat world?

Our message, of course, emerges from the One who dwells within us.

Once Jesus had an intense experience.

It was more thrilling than bungee cord jumping and more exhilarating than skydiving.

It was His transfiguration where upon conferring with Moses and Elijah high upon the mountaintop, Jesus shines more brightly than the most sparkling white light.

Better than a halogen light bulb, more refined than a tight laser beam and whiter than Clorox 2, Jesus was changed and turned into something wonderful—the radiant Son of God!

He was changed because high upon that mount, Jesus had one foot in heaven and one foot on earth.

But after God had spoken and Moses and Elijah departed again into heaven, Jesus comes down the mountain.

Friends, while our strengthening comes from up top the mountain, our work is always down below.

More than likely, it is more fun on the mountaintop (Peter thought it was)!

But the work of God is always down below.

When we think “they” (whoever “they” are) are beneath us...then it’s time to come down the mount to put ourselves in the same place that they are.

It is Dietrich Boenhoffer’s resistance against the against Nazis.¹

It is Mother Teresa living amongst the poor in Calcutta.²

It is Father Maximillian Kolbe who too the place of a Jewish prisoner about to be executed at Auschwitz.³

This is Christian courage and bravery at its best.

Rather than staying up top and basking in the power of His glory, Jesus takes a bold step of faith and descends the mountain.

Perhaps we go down to sights we don’t wish to see.

Perhaps we go down to hear arguments we don’t want to hear.

Perhaps we go down to encounter pain and brokenness and confusion.

But go down we must.

Our role, if we are to be true believers isn’t to build memorials trying to somehow preserve and remember the glory.

Jesus has no time for memorials and neither do we.

Why?

Because they (your neighbours, your friends, your co-workers), they need you down there.

Where it’s dirty and diseased and conflicted.

They need us where they are as ones who hope, as ones who never give up, as ones that do not accept brokenness as being God’s best.

We come down the mount to do God’s work—to encourage, to pray, to be merciful, to offer help, to be caring, to model patience, to radiate Christ’s light in dark places.

¹ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Bonhoeffer.html>

² <http://www.ewtn.com/motherteresa/>

³ Read Father Kolbe’s amazing story at: <http://www.auschwitz.dk/Kolbe.htm>

Doesn't the father of the demon-possessed boy say, "but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

Haven't we already learned that we are not the church of "If"?

And Jesus almost snaps back on the man, "*If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.*"⁴

Say it with me, Friends, "*We are not the church of If.*"

There are too many "if" churches out there, but Zion Church is not one of them!

No, our church has a track record of doing that, which is impossible—how about birthing another congregation in the late 1800s (Zion helped to birth Oakley UCC).

Or how about building a sanctuary during the height of the Great Depression—which Zion did!

I say we shall do the impossible yet again.

After hearing Jesus say, "*All things are possible to him who believes*" "*immediately*" the text says—which is Mark's favourite word—"the father of the child cried out and said, '*I believe, help my unbelief.*'"⁵

Belief changes everything.

When the disciples want to know why they were powerless to cast out this demon—Jesus said, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything, but prayer.'

Friends, you wish to do God's work, like the disciples—I do not fill your pews with people; I give you a Prayer Room.

Friends, you wish to see others healed, I don't give you Band Aids, I give you a Prayer Room.

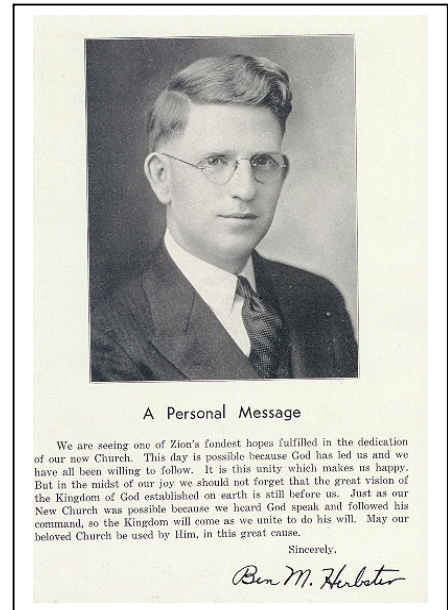
Friends, you wish to see the people of Norwood draw close to God, and I do not give you plans for a renewed Surrey Square, I give you a Prayer Room.

Remember, every time you leave this building—this Mount Zion—you must literally go down the hill.

And so we go.

Believing the impossible, helping the helpless and praying the incredible!

Amen.



⁴ Mark 9:23.

⁵ Mark 9:24.

The photo and excerpt (above right) is of Dr. Ben Herbster when Zion Church's new sanctuary was built in the 1930s. He writes about "the great vision of the Kingdom of God." He writes, "...our New Church (caps are his) was possible because we heard God speak." I draw a parallel between these words and Mark 9:7.

Questions For Reflection:

1. Do you agree that we are a society that is searching for the next “high?” What, if anything, does this mean to you?
2. Have you ever had a ‘mountaintop experience’ with the Lord? If so, what was it like?
3. Why is it necessary to come down the mountain?
4. What is the work that God has for you to do down at the bottom of the mountain?
5. How is Zion NOT a church of “If?” Can you cite some examples?
6. What should you remember every time that you leave our building?