

Mount Everest, at 29K feet high, is one of the tallest mountains in the world. Mountain climbers who have reached one of the peaks have witnessed some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in the world. Above an altitude of 26K feet, is what climbers call, “the death zone.” At this altitude and above, the human body starts to die from lack of oxygen... slowly perhaps, but surely. Humans were not made to be able to live there. This doesn’t stop people from going up there, but sooner or later, they must come down. Sooner or later, they must come down to the valley.

There is a spiritual analogy. Life is filled with peaks and valleys. A peak is something excellent that happens in your life, something great, something to celebrate and remember: the birth of your child, the day you get married.... During those moments, it’s easy to be a Christian. “God is good” you think to yourself. There’s no doubt in your mind that God is blessing you.

But life isn’t always a peak experience. There are the valleys too. Times when the troubles of life overwhelm us, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job. I remember being in the hospital, knowing that I had a heart problem... I was gearing myself for a surgery... On Sunday, the doctor comes up to me and says “we are not doing the surgery... your heart is too weak. You would not survive. I remember the feeling of despair -“my heart is too weak...” “I would not survive surgery...” These words going through my mind over and over. I was in the valley of the shadow of death. I was in the valley and was dropped into despair.

These are the difficult moments which can sometimes make us feel like we’re drowning. During those moments, it can be more difficult to be a Christian... When you’re in the valley, it’s hard to say, “God is good.” When things are going all wrong... it’s hard to believe that God is in control or that the God who is in control, loves you or that He has plans of good for you. Sometimes, in the valleys your very faith can be shaken. When you’re in a valley, you walk with doubt, for sure....

But that is part of life... Peaks and valleys! Peaks and valleys! Where are you right now? Are you on top of a peak? Or are you in a valley? Maybe you’re somewhere in between. Maybe you’ve just come off a peak and the excitement is still fresh with you. Or perhaps you see a valley before you, and you are filled with dread. It’s important to remember that life is more than striving from one peak to another. Life is a series of peaks and valleys. So long as we live in these mortal sinful bodies, we will experience peaks and valleys.

Yet, I have good news. Because we are children of God, God has offered us a peak which will always be there. From the view of this peak, all of life's peaks and valleys are low. The peak I speak of is a peak which will never fail. This peak is given to us through the Word of God. This peak is Jesus Christ "This Peak" is the subject of our gospel lesson Luke 9:28.

In this story, Jesus' disciples are feeling good. They were on a peak. Things with Jesus seemed to be going so well. He had performed miracles walking on the water, feeding the 5000. He had been surrounded by crowds of people, listening to his Words. It was easy to be a disciple of Jesus at that time. There was no doubt that this was the Son of God, the Savior of the world. The disciples were experiencing one high-point after another with Jesus. But what they didn't know was that right around the corner loomed a valley - the valley of the shadow of death. In just a short while, the crowds would turn against Jesus and would turn against them. Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, tortured, publicly condemned, and finally executed... executed in the most brutal way known to man at that time. There was a valley coming. And the valley was right around the corner. The disciples would be filled with fear and doubt - fear for their lives and doubt about who Jesus was. Soon, it would be very difficult to be a disciple of Christ. A deep, DARK valley was right around the corner. A deep dark valley was right around the corner and the disciples had no idea.

They didn't know. But Jesus did. And so that is why, Jesus takes them to the top of a mountain. He lets them experience something amazing... With their own eyes, they catch a glimpse of his glory. Right before the valley, Jesus takes them to a mountain, to a high point, to strengthen them for the difficult road ahead. Today, it is good for us to go on this journey WITH those disciples too, and experience WITH them this high point. For it, too, prepares us. For it too, prepares us for the valleys of Life.

Up until today, in the readings of the church year, you have heard about the successes of Christ's ministry, how powerful he is... what a great teacher he is... how he is the Son of God and Savior of the World.... But soon it will be Lent. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is this coming Wednesday. The readings will change. This is the time in the church year when we descend with Jesus into His valley of the shadow of death. We'll hear about how he was rejected. How he was weak. How he suffered and finally how he died for the sins of the world. In these next six weeks, we are going to walk with Jesus, into a valley, and see those difficult moments. However, this mountain-top experience we hear about today the transfiguration will prepare us for the valley ahead, It tells us that no matter

what valley Jesus was in, God was always in control. Therefore, it also prepares us for our own personal valleys. As we see Jesus glorified here today, it prepares us for when we go through our own valleys... our own difficult times. For it tells us that no matter what valley we are in, God is always in control.

Luke 9 records the transfiguration of Jesus. The word “transfigure” means that Jesus’ appearance completely changed. The other gospels tell us that his face changed; that His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” Another Gospel writer tells us that Jesus’ clothes became “as bright as a flash of lightning.” At that moment, Jesus revealed his divine nature. He was the holy, almighty God, and the brightness of his appearance revealed that to his disciples.

Why was it important for the disciples to see this? It was good, because soon the disciples would see Jesus dirty and bloody and weak and dying. During that time, it would seem as though Jesus was nothing more than a lowly man. But here, at the mountain top for one brief shining moment it was clear, as he shone brighter than the sun – He was God – Holy, Almighty, and Powerful.

“And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

The Gospels tell us, they were talking about His future death and resurrection and ascension. Why was this good for the disciples to see... Jesus talking with two of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament? It was important because, soon, they would be entering a valley. People would be saying that Jesus was against the prophets... that Jesus had nothing to do with the prophets.... that Jesus was a heretic... But for one shining moment on that mountain top it was clear “who Jesus was.” Elijah, Moses, and Jesus – speaking together about his crucifixion... Jesus was the fulfillment of their prophecies. Jesus and the prophets were on the same team.

Then suddenly... a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him. The voice of God the Father himself! Why was this important for those disciples to hear? Obviously, it wasn’t for Jesus sake. He didn’t need to know that God was pleased with him. No, this voice from the clouds was for the disciples. This voice was there to prepare them, to prepare them for the valley they would soon be experiencing. Soon, people would be saying that Jesus was not the Son of God. The religious leaders would be saying that no one should listen to Jesus. Soon, it

would seem as though God, himself, didn't love Jesus... As Jesus carried his cross down the road to Golgotha it would appear to human eyes that God had forsaken Jesus.

But here, on the mountain top, for one brief moment it was clear Jesus was the true Son of God, loved by the Father, He is the one whose words we should listen to. This, this mountain top experience, this transfiguration was a high point for those disciples, a peak experience. They saw Christ in all his glory, surrounded by the prophets, and acclaimed by God the Father. This experience... this experience would help and strengthen them as they continued on with Jesus into the valley of the shadow of death, on His divinely appointed path toward the crucifixion. The transfiguration was for them.

The Transfiguration is for us, too. The Transfiguration is an encouragement to us as we go through our own personal peaks and valleys in life. I do not know where you are right now – if you are experiencing a high moment, or a low moment. For that matter, I don't know where you will be two years from now or 10 years from now. I do not know what high moments or low moments you will be going through. But I do know, "you do not need to face them alone." For us today, right now, this Sunday "it is good for us to be here," because in the Gospel we are reminded of our Savior's glory, we are reminded "who he really is." Just as the disciples climbed a mountain and saw the transfiguration of Christ, every time you come here, to church, every time you hear the Word of God, you have climbed the mountain with Christ. you have beheld him in his glory. Here, you see Christ, who has taken your sins away on the cross and who has risen from the dead. Here you receive his body and blood and you experience the power of God's forgiveness. Here you catch a glimpse of his glory, even if it's just for a moment. Sunday morning worship – this is your mountain top. It is good for you to be here, because this is where you are strengthened for the days ahead, for all the peaks and valleys that are around the corner for you.

I have a story for you... There was a Christian woman who was confined to her home due to an illness. Yet despite that she was always bright and cheerful and optimistic, She lived in an attic apartment on the fifth floor of an old, rundown building. A friend decided to visit her one day and brought along another woman – a person of great wealth. Since there was no elevator, the two ladies began the long climb upward. When they reached the second floor, the well-to-do woman commented, "What a dark and filthy place!" Her friend replied, "It's better higher up." When they arrived at the third floor landing, the remark was made: "Things look even worse here." Again, the reply was: "It's better higher up." Finally, they

reached the attic level, where they found the bedridden woman. Although the room was clean and flowers were on the windowsill, the wealthy visitor could not contain herself about the stark surroundings and blurted out: "It must be very difficult for you to be here like this!" Without a moment's hesitation the shut-in responded: "It will be better higher up."

She had found the secret of true satisfaction and contentment. Right now, she was in a valley, but with the eyes of faith she saw the peak. She had been with Jesus in his Word. She had seen his glory on the mountain top. If you are in a peak time of your life, savor it with loved ones, encourage others, and give thanks to God for Jesus is there celebrating with you. If you are in a valley of life, share it with loved ones, that you might not suffer alone. Also know that, as a child of God you never suffer any valley alone. God tells us not to fear, for He is with us. No matter what valley we are presently in, there is a peak waiting for us. No matter what valley we are in, because of Christ, we know that God is always in control, and that God loves us, and has plans of good.