

The high mountain which Jesus and three disciples ascend in Mark 9 is not named. This has left room for speculation. The presence of Moses, Elijah, God's voice and a cloud, however, make me join the camp which believes this Mark 9 mountain is symbolic of Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai is the place where both Moses and Elijah received Divine encouragement for the last parts of their work on earth. Given that Jesus has been talking about suffering, rejection, the cross and death (Mk 8:31-9:1) just prior to the trek up the high mountain, I suspect Moses and Elijah were present to root Jesus on knowing that things don't get easier once you are down the mountain. God's voice not only affirms Jesus' special designation as a Beloved child as well as his ministry which holds together the Torah and Prophets—Moses representing the law / Torah and Elijah the Prophets—but the whole scene is one of encouragement as he begins the next phase of his ministry. Let me share:

In Exodus 24 we have this beautiful episode of God inviting Moses up Mt. Sinai. Notice here the reference to six days and Moses then being enveloped in the cloud of God; quite similar to the mention of "six days" in Mark 9:2 and the mention of a cloud in 9:7. On to another similarity with Moses...

It is not like things had been easy for Moses prior to ascending Mt. Sinai. The people had been quarreling with God and Moses regarding provisions of food (Ex 16.20) and water (Ex 17.3ff). Jesus, too, had his issues with his merry band of disciples prior to ascending the high mountain. They questioned his care of them on the storm vexed sea (Mk 4:35ff). They questioned how a little bread could feed five thousand (Mk 6:35ff). Peter even had the audacity to rebuke the Messiah for his understanding of messiahship (8:32)—how rich is that? It would not be unreasonable to assume Jesus and Moses were a bit discouraged with God's chosen people at the time they reached their respective mountains. If life was bad prior to ascending the Mountain, it gets even worse once they get down.

After forty days on the Mt Sinai Moses descends to re-join God's people. He was not gone long, but long enough for them to craft an idol of gold in the form of a calf (Ex 32). The book of *Numbers* details more complaining (ch 11), Miriam & Aaron's jealousy (ch 12), an attempted leadership coup (ch 14), and more complaining resulting in a plague of serpents (ch 21). One might have thought a trip to the Promised Land would be easier! Jesus, also, is leading his people to a type of promised land, and neither is that journey nice and neat. Despite having been instructed by a Divine voice to listen to Jesus, the disciples seem more preoccupied with what the scribes are saying than Jesus (9:7 // 9:11). After this they can be heard quarrelling about which of them is the greatest (9:35). The disciples are found napping in the garden when Jesus had requested prayer (14:37), and then they

betrayed Jesus as well as denied knowing him. Moses and Jesus are connected in many interesting ways.

The links with Elijah are nearly as obvious in the text and maybe more so. Elijah like references actually appear quite often in Mark's gospel with two of them in our brief passage from Mark today. Jesus links Elijah's ministry with one of God's in-breaking actions among a people languishing under sub-standard civil and religious leadership. The scribes, and the disciples of Jesus it appears, were thinking Elijah symbolized the end of the world. Jesus reframes this attitude: it is the end of the world as you have known it. I do not think it is an exaggeration or poor Christology to say that Jesus needed Divine encouragement to face what was coming next.¹ And if Jesus needed it, we need it all the more. We all benefit from God's voice intoning to us that we are beloved, and we benefit from the stories of people like Moses and Elijah-- uncertain heroes trusting as they go.

There are known and unknown sufferings which await us almost every day. Some are living with cancer or some debilitating illness, and we need encouragement. Some are living with loved ones in chronic pain or some other breakdown of the body, mind or spirit, and we need encouragement. Some live with interpersonal challenges at home or at work or in the extended family, and we need encouragement. Financial hardship haunts some in their businesses, places of employment, and domestic settings, and we need encouragement. Some are bullied or suffer on account of their race, nationality or orientation, and we need encouragement. Some are confronting empires and systems which discriminate and exploit, and we need encouragement.

The hymns we sing and hum in this place are a source of encouragement—reminding us through text and tune of God's steadfast love and mercy. The stories we tell around here—personal stories and bible stories—are encouragement that God's story can and will continue. The community connections which we foster and nurture are encouragement that we are not alone. The prayers we offer encourage us that the Spirit praying within us links us across time and space. The candles we light encourage us that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The bread and cup we share at this table encourages us that God so loved the world, and loves us, that the Divine would choose to become flesh so that we might know a way to live well, a way to die well, and the way to the life which is beyond this life. Is it a mountain top with prophets appearing and Divine voices speaking affectionately from a cloud? No, but it is something and it does make a difference and it is Good News. Amen.

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¹ Ched Myers, Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle (OFM), Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor-- *"Say to this Mountain": Mark's Story of Discipleship* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 108—110.

Communion Liturgy (Adapted from *Leader*, Summer 2016)

Preparation for Communion:

Susanne: God of grace, as we prepare to share in the abundant life Christ offers through bread and wine at your table of love, we pray:

God, you have declared that we are your beloved creation, made in your image. You have formed our minds, our bodies, and our spirits to be good. You have offered us life in abundance.

Loving God, we give you thanks. [Congregation repeats]

Too often we have failed to see ourselves as your beloved children. Too often we have not cared for your creation. Too often we have neglected your offer of abundant life.

Loving God, forgive us.

We know love because you loved us first. We flourish in your love, as we express your love among ourselves and with our neighbors. We find safety and peace in the beloved community of faith.

Loving God, we give you thanks.

Too often we have concealed our sorrow, anger, and pain. Too often we have neglected to offer prayers of kindness, and to give words of hope and signs of care. Too often we have spoken or kept silence in ways that hurt ourselves or another.

Loving God, forgive us.

God, you have shown us the way of life. We have followed Jesus, who proved what it means to be kind and faithful and strong. You have placed before us the challenge and joy of life.

Loving God, we give you thanks.

Too often we are tempted to give in to our fears. Too often we are tempted to deny your faithful love. Fear, death, and denial of your love—these we lay down. And together we will say, “We step into life.” *We step into life. AMEN*

Peace Greeting:

Patrick: Be assured that God offers us grace. God is for us!

Nothing will separate us, God, from your love in Christ Jesus, who told his followers, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

As the Risen Jesus joined two of his disciples for a meal in their home, we too, “like the disciples at Emmaus, will host and be hosted by the risen Christ in [our] own home[s],” whether in this sanctuary or in our individual homes.² Though we remain the scattered Body of Christ, we bear witness to the peace and presence of Christ who unites us across the distance and makes us whole in the sharing of this meal.

² James Alison, <http://prayingeucharistically.com/>

Words of Institution:

Patrick: Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God!

Susanne: Many will come from east and west and from north and south and will eat at God's table. (*Matt 8:11*)

P: At the Passover meal in the upper room, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. (*Mark 14:22*) He said to his disciples in "I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you." (*Luke 22:15*)

S: When our Beloved, the risen Christ, was eating at the table with the disciples, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. (*Luke 24:35*)

P: Jesus says: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (*John 6:35*) The risen Christ welcomes us to the feast before us.

S: And so now at this simple table we, too, bless and break the bread, remembering Christ's words: "This is my body. When you share bread together, remember me." (*lift and break bread*)

P: We raise the cup, remembering Christ's words: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. When you drink it together, remember me." (*lift cup*)

The Bread and Cup:

Susanne: God of grace,
your mercy and goodness overflow each day, filling us with a harvest of love.
Thank you for this bread of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.
May your Spirit feed us with this bread, nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits. AMEN

We now invite you to open the top clear layer of your communion package, or to take the bread you have prepared at home, and eat together: **The bread of life.**

Patrick: God of love,
your faithfulness roots our lives, holding us with patience and grace.
Thank you for this cup of Christ, blessed by earth, hand, and heaven.
May your Spirit satisfy us with this cup, quenching the thirsts of our bodies, minds, and spirits. AMEN

We now invite you to open the foil layer of your cup or the cup you have prepared at home, and drink together: **The cup of salvation.**

Post-Communion Prayer:

Patrick: Loving God,

By your Spirit, let the bread we have broken and the cup we have shared be a communion with Christ and one another.

By your Spirit, bind us in communion with all creation;

By your Spirit, empower us to offer your abundant life to the world you love.

Remembering these gifts of grace, we celebrate and give you thanks.

United with Christ and with all who stand before you in earth and heaven, we worship you, O God, in everlasting praise.

We bless you for nourishing us in the love of this community and for sustaining us in hope.

Through Jesus Christ. AMEN

SENDING HYMN

Benediction

Susanne: We are God's people.

Shaped and formed by water and Word.

Sustained and nourished by the fruit of love.

Together, let us live as God's people.³

AMEN

³ Adapted from Graham Sparkes and Anthea Sully, "An Agape Liturgy," in *Gifts in Open Hands: More Worship Resources from the Global Community*, ed. Tirabassi and Wonson Eddy (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 143.

*Radiant God, source of light,
as you surrounded Jesus with your glory,
so you come to us in penetrating brightness.*

You catch us off guard and expose our weakness.

*We choose the limelight while you call us to explore the shadows
and brighten the darkness.*

*We seek the spectacular while you bind up the broken in
countless acts of mercy.*

*We seek to stay on the mountain or in a comfortable pew while
you walk to the valleys of need.*

*Radiant God,
fill us with light and courage to carry good news into all the
corners of the world and to bring back the joy of your presence.
Amen*