

Matthew 17:1-9

People speak of having a “mountain-top experience.” If you have ever been up on a high mountain, you know what is meant by the phrase. Sitting on top of the world, looking out over the beauty of God’s creation, filling your lungs with clear, fresh air, watching an eagle or a condor soaring; it can be very inspiring.

Throw in Moses and Elijah, and Jesus, whose appearance is altered so that His divine majesty shines like the sun in all its brightness, and you can understand my Peter never wanted to leave. “*How good, Lord, to be here!*” he cried, “*I’ll make some shelters.*” This is one mountain-top experience that he wanted to hold on to for some time.

That’s how you feel, isn’t it, when you are here? “*How good, Lord, to be here!*” you sing. “Let’s stay here; it’s exhilarating! I really don’t want this Divine Service to come to an end!” Then again, perhaps this is not how you feel. We sing the words, “How good, Lord, to be here,” but we think the words: “How long, Lord, must we be here?”

Peter felt the same way. Oh, not on top of the Mt. of Transfiguration. He sang: “How long, Lord, must I be here?” on top of Mt. Calvary. He couldn’t wait to leave. In fact, he did. He left Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives. He hightailed it away from Jesus as fast as his legs would carry him.

Jesus took with Him, Peter, James, and John up the Mt. of Transfiguration, and He did not allow them to stay there. They were given a foretaste of the feast to come - a glimpse of heaven - but then it was back down the mountain. No one, not these three disciples, nor anyone else, could stay and live up on that high mountain. We do not live on the mountain-top; we live down in the dark valley of the shadow of death. We don’t live in glory; we live amid suffering and weakness. We spend our days going back and forth between joy and sorrow, thrills and tears.

Like Peter, we long for heaven. “How good, Lord, to be there!” But *there* is not where we are. Not yet. Some of our loved ones are there. As Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the Mt. of Glory, so He has taken some of our dear family members and friends up that high mountain. And there He has built a shelter for them - a shelter against tears of sorrow; against sickness and weakness; against even death.

Now, of course, to build a shelter it takes wood and nails. And so when Peter offered to build shelters up on that high mountain, Jesus ignored him. Peter was out of his mind. He had nothing with which to build. Jesus knew what it would take to build shelters on the Mt. of Glory, and that’s why He led His disciples back down the mountain. Jesus had to go to Mt. Calvary to be nailed to a cross; and with that cross and those nails, He would build your shelter on heaven’s high mountain.

But Peter ran away from Mt. Calvary. And this is the same desire that lives in all of us. We, like Peter, think that we have what it takes to build a solid shelter for ourself in heaven. This is why we, along with all who are sinners, have a distaste for the cross of Calvary. Who needs the wood

and nails of the cross, when we can build ourself a shelter using our good works, our love for God and our neighbor, our basic goodness?

In response, Jesus points us to Mt. Calvary; He points us to our Baptism; He points us to His Holy Absolution and Holy Supper..."Here is the shelter I have built for you," He says; "Your hard work and effort avails for nothing. But fear not. My works are for you. My cross and nails are for your good. My blood was shed to seal for you a beautiful shelter on the mountain-top of heaven."

That shelter is yours even now; but you do not live there yet. You live, work, go to school right here where life is difficult. You and me both - we live sometimes with fears, often with guilt. We live struggling with sinful thoughts and desires. And we're stuck here. Jesus has not yet come to take us to our shelter on the high mountain.

But, you see, this is why He did not stay up on the mountain with His disciples. He came down that mountain. He came down into your valley and mine. He came because we need Him. Jesus did not stay up on the Mt. of Glory and say to us, "Okay now, you come up to Me here!" We could never do it. We cannot climb that high mountain. Jesus must carry us up the mountain.

And that's why He came down...for you. He went to Calvary's cross carrying your sin and guilt, your punishment. Jesus did not hold on to the glory He had on that high mountain-top. He exchanged it for a cross; for a place in a tomb. He gave up His glory to build you a glorious shelter on the mountain-top of heaven.

And no, you are not there yet. You are here, living each day as it comes. And each day brings its own troubles. But Jesus is here with you, and He will not leave you. Until He takes you up to your shelter on the mountain-top, He shelters you here. He spreads His wings over you like a mother hen. He wraps you within His arms. He holds you in His nail-pierced hands.

This is why we sing, "How good, Lord, to be here!" Because until we are there with Christ, He is here with us. Here are His words of life for you. Here is forgiveness, the forgiveness He won for you on Mt. Calvary. This forgiveness is for every one of you, for you in truth are forgiven. "How good, Lord, to be here!" for here Jesus comes to give us pardon for our sins.

Here is Jesus' Holy Supper - a foretaste of the feast to come. It's not heaven, but it's the closest thing to heaven. For here in this Sacrament is where heaven and earth meet. From here we see the mountain-top. Here are Moses and Elijah and all the saints. Yes, truly, "How good, Lord, to be here!"

One day we will sing these words with all the saints in heaven. But until Jesus takes us to our beautiful shelter there, it is good for us to be here. How good, Lord, to be here with You! Amen.