**February 27, 2022 Luke 9:28-31**

***To Lift Up and Encourage***

**Scripture:** Luke 9:28-31 NRSV

*(28)… Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. (29)And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. (30)Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. (31)They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

**Notes:**

1. Many of us focus on these three men and ***ignore*** Jesus here.
   1. We need ***encouragement*** in big moments of life.
   2. Jesus was just as ***human*** as you and me.
   3. Jesus needed ***encouragement*** for the days to come.
2. The transfiguration is preparing ***Jesus*** to face sin and death.
   1. Jesus would die as if he was ***guilty*** of all sin.
   2. Jesus needed all the ***encouragement*** that he could get.
3. This event was a time of ***encouragement*** to the disciples.
   1. They needed to know who ***Jesus*** was,
   2. They needed to know the events were ***necessary***.
4. It is not easy following God’s plan and be a ***faithful*** ***disciple***.
   1. A time will come when staying loyal is ***difficult***.
   2. There will be times when we need to be ***encouraged***.
   3. The ***Holy*** ***Spirit*** encourages us.
5. Think about people who have been ***encouragers*** to you.
   1. They were God’s ***servants*** to you.
   2. Thank God for those ***significant*** people.
6. Who have you been an ***encourager*** to?
   1. Look for those who need ***encouragement***.
   2. The heavenly Father ***encourages*** us today through the Holy Spirit.
   3. Pass on that ***encouragement*** to others.

**Script:**

Encouragement, where would we be without encouragement? In my life encouragement has been key to helping me succeed, helping me to keep going when things get difficult. Encouragement is the one thing that can help you most when things seem the bleakest.

I remember many moments in my life when things seemed to be the bleakest and the people who took the time to speak with me, encourage me, and, in that, made me who I am today. The earliest memories were of my cousins who helped teach me how to play baseball, but I am sure my parents were there from the beginning encouraging me to grow and mature. I remember my line coach in 10th grade, the first adult who ever tried to teach me anything about the art of playing line on the football field. He had a way of smiling at you and making you feel as if he saw more in you than what you were putting out. I remember one time we were doing a running drill and I told him I couldn’t do anymore, he told me that if I was able to talk, I was able to do more, he pushed me verbally and encouraged me mentally to not quit but to keep trying. To keep going until every ounce of energy had left my body. One day when I had reached that point, He sat next to me on the grass and as I struggled to catch my breath, he shared with me that what I was feeling was giving my all on the field and until I reached this point in a game, I should never stop pushing forward.

We all need encouragement. When we think of an infant, we encourage them to smile, we encourage them to roll over, we encourage them to sit up, we encourage them to crawl, we encourage them stand on two feet, we encourage them to take that first step, we encourage them to walk on their own, and then we spend the rest of our lives trying to slow them down. We need encouragement.

We need it when we’re young; we need it when we’re old and we need it in the years between. It might seem strange but even those who are doing well in life need encouragement. It’s clear that those who are struggling need encouragement. We can recognize the importance of encouragement and really like it when someone sees our struggles and encourages us. Encouragement is one of those things that we don’t do enough. And today as we look at our Gospel sermon passage for this Transfiguration Sunday found in Luke 9:28-43 We may wonder what this has to do with encouragement. Stand with me as we share in the reading of this passage.

Luke 9:28-31 NRSV (28)… Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. (29)And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. (30)Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. (31)They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Many of us have heard this story before, many of us know from hearing it so many times what is going to happen next. But many of us are looking at the disciples and especially the actions of Peter. We focus on these three men and we tend to ignore exactly what Jesus is doing here. Yes Peter is about to stick his foot in hos mouth, James and John, the ‘Sons of Thunder” are speechless. And, Jesus is far enough away that it seems that these disciples of his cannot hear clearly what is being discussed between Jesus and the visitors, Elijah and Moses. There are many angles from which we can approach this story and there are some situations that you just cannot ignore. Jesus has taken Peter, James and John along with him for a reason; they are to see what Jesus is doing and maybe even why? Jesus is meeting with two of the highest-ranking leaders of the Jewish faith. What can we take from this? And we can’t help but forget the voice of God interrupting all of these things going on to remind all there, just who Jesus is and how much he is loved by God.

What does all of this have to do with encouragement? Sometimes we need encouragement in the simplest events of our daily life; just a little lift to get us through the day. Maybe it is a phone call, a note of appreciation, a simple act of kindness, something as simple as somebody saying that they have been praying for you. Then there are those big moments in life; moments when you are unsure, or when you get dog tired., when you find yourself at a crossroads and you need help in making a major decision, it is in these moments that encouragement means the most.

Just before climbing the mountain, Jesus informed his disciples that he would suffer at the hands of His enemies, and be put to death. He knows what the days ahead hold for him. He knew that he would face wickedness in Jerusalem and he would need to face it head on. Also he knew that his actions would have repercussions for all of mankind, for those who were alive then, yes; but also for all of mankind for all of time.

Let us not forget that Jesus was truly human and just because he knew what lie ahead that would not take the pain and anguish away. Jesus was just as human as you and me. He experienced the same joys and fears as each of us do. God the Father knew also that Jesus needed encouragement for the days to come just any of us would need. Jesus has been on the road traveling, meeting the people, healing the sick, raising people from the dead, calming storms, feeding the hungry; and now he is approaching the point for which he came to this world; his final trip to Jerusalem. He must have doubts, he must have fears, and he must have a need for encouragement; that is what this trip up the mountain is about. This is part of what the transfiguration is for; preparing Jesus to face the final battle with sin and death, encouraging Him to follow the Father’s will and walk forward in faith.

He is completely innocent, he had committed no wrong, no sin; but he would die as if he did, cruelly; whipped and beaten; mocked and ridiculed; nailed to a cross; naked and humiliated, while everyone watched as he struggled just to breathe. Just the thought of this would make anyone of us cringe, the strongest of us would flinch at the thought of it. But Luke tells us that Elijah and Moses spent some time together talking about the events that would be taking place in the near future, talking about God’s plan to save humanity and how the events would be carried out through his death in Jerusalem. Everything about to take place was a huge task to accomplish and Jesus needed all the encouragement that he could get to keep his eyes on the task at hand and the goal to be accomplished.

For a moment I would like you to visualize what Jesus was being asked to do; visualize what these events were going to cost Jesus; imagine if you can, the pain and suffering that he knew he would need to endure. God the Father put his hands on Jesus’ shoulders and gently said, you got this son, I support you all the way. I know that it will be difficult, incredibly tough, but this is why you came to this point; to your calling. You can do it.

But this event on the mountain top was not only to encourage Jesus. Seeing Jesus face with its dazzling glow and hearing Elijah and Moses speaking about what was going to take place, was also a time of encouragement to the disciples. The three men, who are seen as Jesus' closest and dearest disciples, his inner circle so to speak, were going to need encouragement too in the days to come and the events of this day on the mountain would need to be the catalyst for such encouragement. They needed to know who Jesus was, so when the doubts would come, they would be able to address them. They needed to know that the events that were about to take place were necessary for Jesus to fulfill His purpose and mission in this world. Those words spoken from the heavenly voice of the Father, “This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” confirmed that Jesus was God’s son and that he was especially chosen for this task.

We can safely say that when everything in the disciple’s life turned upside down; Jesus was arrested, then crucified the disciples were confused and troubled by everything that was going on. Yet when they would look back on the crazy events of these days and especially the day on the mountain top, they would be able to put the puzzle pieces together; and what took place in Jerusalem stared to make sense to them. They could see how everything was woven together as part of God’s greater plan of salvation for all of humanity.

It is not easy following God’s plan or being a faithful disciple. For any Christian who takes Jesus’ words seriously there will come a time when staying loyal is difficult. Being obedient and loyal in our service to Christ is not an easy task; it is not something that comes naturally and there will be times when we need to be encouraged. God knows this. God knows this so much that one of the gifts of the spirit is encouragement. Look in Romans 12:8, the word means to literally come alongside another in partnership to give them a lift. The word Paul uses here in this passage has the same origin as the word used for the Holy Spirit, Paraclete, otherwise known as the counselor, or encourager; the one who comes alongside others representing Christ to them. The Holy Spirit does this for us; now we are called to do it for each other.

We are called to do this, to encourage the fellow members of the church as well as those we are able to see the Holy Spirit working on. Every congregation where people of differing backgrounds and differing ideas are united together, there will be those times when the words we say or our actions or reactions to others, will be seen as put downs, dislike, or disrespect. Most of us have felt that way at times and most of us have contributed to these attitudes and behaviors. We are all guilty to some degree or other. When the disciples were traveling with Jesus, they often got it wrong and couldn’t understand why Jesus would want to touch lepers, have dinner with all kinds of undesirable people, he would even give up his valuable time to children. All the disciples could do was stand back, watch and question.

On occasions when the disciples were anything but encouraging, Jesus responded with love, forgiveness, and encouraged the disciples to consider what was happening. He wanted them to be encouraging; people who didn’t look down on others but were supportive of even those who didn’t seem to be worthy of this kind of treatment. It was often a difficult lesson for them to learn but as we read the Book of Acts, we see how the love of Christ in their lives would win the day. Before meeting Jesus, there were certain kinds of people they avoided. But with Christ’s love in their hearts, they did everything possible to be without prejudice and encourage those they encountered, whether they be jailers, Romans, Greeks, Ethiopians, Jews, whoever crossed their path to be disciples of Jesus.

***Conclusion***

Just for a moment think about people who have been encouragers to you. Anyone who is a leader of some kind, whether they work in a healthcare facility or serve in a public school, they may be the pastor of a congregation or a county commissioner, maybe even the president of the United States; still there are times when the load becomes very heavy. I know how much I appreciate the encouragement that people give me. It may be as personal as, “I really enjoyed your sermon today”, or just as simple as “amen,” but even the simplest encouragement can have a powerful impact in stressful and demanding times.

Think about this for a moment; who has been an encourager to you? In one way or another they were God’s servants to you, whether they realized it or not, lifting you up and giving you the confidence to keep on doing a good job, helping you deal with moments of doubt in your ability, supporting you and encouraging you when everything seemed to be hopeless. Thank God for those significant people in our lives who have been encouragers. This question is followed by who have you been an encourager to; who have you sent a card of encouragement to, who have you complimented on their service in the church or even in the community. Each of you should not be looking for encouragement from others but looking to whom encouragement is needed; and then deliver to them a word of encouragement, a pat on the back, or maybe even just a smile to let them know that you are thinking about them.

It follows then to ask, “How can we be God’s servants who encourage others? How can we encourage others, get alongside them and give them a lift”. For some people encouraging comes easy, others have to work at it. In the New Testament there are lots of statements that include the words ‘one another’. Statements like love one another, pray for one another, care for one another. Alongside these is ‘encourage one another’. We may never realize this but years down the track someone will remember with thanks the words or deeds of encouragement that you gave.

The heavenly Father encouraged Jesus that day on the mountain top, He also encouraged the disciples, James, John, and Peter; and he encourages us today through the Holy Spirit. Let's pass on that encouragement to others – at home, at work, where we relax. Let’s pass on that encouragement especially to those who serve us in this church.