



**“Reflections on a Mountain Top Experience”
Matthew 17: 1 - 8
Seniors: Josh Cox, Susie Hoopes and Alex Sprague
Youth Sunday, March 6, 2011**

Susie Hoopes

“(*Knock* 3x) Normally people wouldn’t pay much attention to something as simple 3 knocks on wood; however, I’ve had the opportunity to see three resounding knocks on a wooden wall as a life-changing experience. For the past six summers I’ve spent time at a Christian summer camp in West Virginia called Camp Sandy Cove, as both a camper and a counselor. Every Saturday, the counselors, or “chiefs” as we call them, perform a Passion play. It is performed in an old gym building made with thin wooden walls that loudly echo when knocked on. In the play, when Jesus is walking the cross to his crucifixion with two guards, they walk around to the back of the building, so they don’t have to act out the crucifixion in front of the audience. To represent Jesus being nailed to the cross, they hit the wall three times, in a steady, slow beat (knock). Each pound on the wall echoes through the building and through everyone’s ears. The first time I heard those knocks, I, like Peter, James, and John heard God saying to me “this is my son, listen to Him.” As these knocks seem to linger in the air, tears start to flow down the faces of many campers and counselors, because all of a sudden people realize what Jesus did for us and they decide to follow and listen to Him, just like God told Peter to listen to him. And at the end of the play, when the campers are dismissed to go back to their cabins, everyone sings a song called “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” As we sing it, that song sounds different than all the other songs we would sing, because many people had truly made the decision to follow Jesus. You can feel their passion for Jesus in their voices. These nights and more specifically those three knocks will always be, for me, a distinct memory of a mountaintop experience.

My decision to be a Christian has made a big difference in my life, for example, it made my experiences at church more meaningful and more powerful. When I went to confirmation class, I was able to really grow in my faith and this class has been a large part of my spiritual journey. Confirmation brought back memories of summer camp, because we learned about faith in our everyday lives and we talked about what we thought about Christianity. Also Chad Miller, reminded me of the counselors at camp.

Coming to church now, after being a camper at Sandy Cove, is a completely different experience than it was before, because now I really want to focus on my relationship with Christ. That is what God told Peter to do in the scripture. God wanted Peter to listen to Jesus, but in order to listen to Jesus, Peter needed to have a relationship with Him. For me this is the most important part of being a Christian: my relationship with Christ. We all need to start a relationship with Jesus to listen to him. Going to church is a great way to start and continue your relationship, but it is important to remember to talk to Jesus through prayer, read your bible, live like a Christian, and always be ready to hear Jesus; in Hebrews it says "...If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." Think about your relationship today. Is it a good relationship, or would you harden your heart?"

Alex Sprague

"Mountains, Mountain Top. We see all these vivid pictures of beautiful mountains and sky lines. Then we see Jesus with Peter, James and John; A bright image where Moses and Elijah appear. This my friends is a mountain top experience. Peter, James and John are closer to God and Jesus than they have ever been before. Many of us may be able to recall our mountain top experiences. They could be at a beach or at a church retreat or camp. Maybe at a friend's house or even right here in our own Sanctuary. They can be anywhere and everywhere, whenever you feel so close to God. I have two mountain top experiences. The first one was when I received my calling to be a minister. First being inspired by Dave Colby; then by Chad Miller. I knew this is where I wanted to spend the rest of my life, in the church, teaching and growing with every member of the congregation. My Second was when Chad died. When he died we all felt similar emotions. All our hearts were heavy with the sadness of the tragedy, but we all came together, as a body of Christ. We supported one another and it was amazing to see this church family be so strong in a horrible time. A mountain top experience that I think we all can relate to is the revolution in Egypt. These people fought for what they believed in and what they knew was right. They protested for 18 days. They finally got what they wanted, for President Mubark to step down and democracy to step in. The Protesters were saying, this is my Egypt, a new Egypt. They took pride in what they did by cleaning up Tahir, which means Liberation, square the day after President Mubark stepped down.

I believe the message that Matthew is trying to give us through this passage is that we are all connected. In this passage we see Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah represent the Old Testament, Jesus represents the New Testament, and it all comes full circle to the way it impacts our lives here in the present. We are all connected and we need to look at our past and then move forward. Audrey West, Associate Professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, IL, explains that early readers of Matthew's gospel probably heard echoes of Exodus 24, when Moses went up the mountain to meet God and the dazzling light of God's presence came down on the mountain, as the events of the Transfiguration unfolded in their hearing, enabling them to perceive Jesus as the "new Moses" who leads and empowers the people of God. Mrs.

West also explains “When Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus, these echoes from long ago resound in the ears of the disciples”.

However, no one gets to remain on the mountain top forever. We all have a spiritual journey, it starts at the time of our baptism, carries through to our confirmation and leads us thru adulthood. Our Spiritual Journey never ends; we can always learn something new. I like to think our spiritual journey is a road, a road that never ends. A road that we are on from birth to death and all our problems and joy, celebrations and heartaches are on this one road.

Jesus is telling us that he is going to die, but the faith will not die with him, it will carry on. Jesus is not physically here with us, but we know that he is always with us in our hearts. He is spiritually with us, always and forever. Amen.”