

THE VIEW FROM LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

Transfiguration – 2/19/12 – Canterbury Contemporary Service – Bill Morgan

Mark 9. 2-9: Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain.

TRAVELS WITH MY COUSIN As kids, my cousin Jimmy rubbed it in how he was two-months older. As little guys, I bit Jimmy on occasion. He loved it. He would cry and get ice-cream sympathy from our grandmother. As we got older, we could get along for awhile, competing for who could run fastest-count the highest-spit the farthest, before being again a human knot of red faces, elbows and knees, trying not to be the first to cry.

July of Jimmy's and my 10th year, our grandparents took us on a road trip to Lookout Mountain. There were pre-trip grandparent lectures on how we were older now, parent threats if we misbehaved, and our best behavior promises. In the backseat of Papa Mac's green '57 Buick, we motored to Chattanooga, with only a few pokes and punches behind their grandparental backs. They said on Lookout Mountain, we could see seven states. I didn't get it at first because I expected each state to be outlined and in different colors with names printed on them like in books at school.

On Lookout Mountain, I saw farther than I had ever seen. My mind stretched to picture the Civil War battle there a century ago. Maybe they were not world travelers, but I saw a wider mix of people there than I had seen. Jimmy and I found more to do than pick at or on each other. Looking back, we began to get beyond cousin rivalry. I got the drift of my grandmother's car talks on my baby brother to be born soon. No longer an only child, she told me, things would be different. It was important for me to be a good brother, help my mother, and understand parents have plenty of love for all their children. On a mountain, you can see things about your life.

JESUS AND FRIENDS ON LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN Because of the stir Jesus was causing in Galilee, he and his disciples go over near Caesarea Philippi to sort out things. He asks who people say he is. 'Elijah or John the Baptist come back to life;' 'a new prophet;' they answer. 'Who do you say?' Jesus asks. Peter beams, 'You are Messiah, the One from God to rescue our world.' Jesus: 'Right!' But when Jesus tells how Messiah will suffer-be killed-rise three days later, Peter sputters, 'No! You will zap our enemies, those stinking Romans; put us on top of the world.' Jesus roars that the devil has gotten into Peter. This Messiah rules by serving, forgiveness, and non-violence. What's more, there's a cross price to pay for any who follow him.

Six days later, Jesus and three disciples go to another Lookout Mountain. They go up nearby Mount Hermon, a snow-cloud capped, now-you-see it-now-you-don't, mystical place. Jesus' face changes; his clothes become dazzling white. Peter, James, and John see long gone Moses and Elijah with Jesus. Both stand for God's way of living with compassion and integrity. Peter is rattled, sputters how he will build some worship tents. A scary cloud covers them. The voice that spoke at Jesus' baptism speaks again. 'This is my Son; listen to him!' The cloud clears. It's just Jesus with them. They see life in a new way. It's not about the thrill of winning but the joy of serving.

ANY DAY OR PLACE CAN BE LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN Here's the Lookout Mountain question we can ask anywhere, anytime. It's also a mirror and window question. "What do I see now about my life, the people in my life, and the God who gives me my life that I did not see before?"

In "The Bucket List," Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson play feisty guys who plan 10 things to do before they die. In a mountain scene, they look across not only the geographical distance but also across the long view of their lives. Freeman asks two questions hard for Nicholson to answer: "Did you have joy and did you give joy to others?"

Late in his life, minister-writer John Claypool told friends how the older he got he believed fewer things, but what he believed he believed more than ever. Asked what, he answered, "I believe in God's grace."

Remember the Frank Sinatra song "I Did It My Way"? The world is a wreck when we do it our way, not Jesus' way. In a world of hungry children, what does it mean to follow Jesus and serve others, to live the grace way? What do we see now that we did not see before about how to measure our life worth, treat people, spend our money, do our work, find and give joy? With the love and pattern of Jesus, look in the mirror and out the window. Not a bucket list, I want to try a new every day list.

- 1. Listen more; talk less**
- 2. Show people I care more; play it safe less**
- 3. Cooperate more; compete less**
- 4. Encourage more; criticize-complain less**
- 5. Do more blessings counting; less score keeping**
- 6. Try to make people glad more, cringe less to see me coming**
- 7. Look more for ways to help; less for someone to blame**
- 8. Be more grateful; less grudgeful**
- 9. Find more reasons to be generous; fewer excuses to be greedy**
- 10. Look more for connections than differences with people who don't like me much and I don't much like.**