

Mountains of Blessing

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on September 26th, 2021 – Season of Creation: Mountain Sunday)

Volcanoes are erupting.
The earth is shaking.
The mountains are making their presence felt.

Mountains take many forms – hills, lofty ranges, icebergs, snow capped ranges, volcanos, grand escarpments.

What or where do you think of when you think about mountains?

My local mountains are the You Yangs – or rather foothills as my friends from Nagaland in the shadow of the Himalayas would say. The picture you have below is of the Stirling Rangers between Esperance and Albany, taken a few years ago and which have since been burnt out.



Another favourite I have is in the Grampians, Mt. Eccle, an old volcano I think, when you get to the top you look down and find a lake, aptly called Lake Surprise.

Where is your favourite mountain? The Himalayas – Mt Everest, Cradle Mountain or the ranges you see as they ride the Tour De France, or somewhere closer to home?

We call them interesting names – sometimes after famous explorers, other times related to our feelings, other times naming them after what they look like – Mt. Disappointment, Glasshouse Mountains, Mt. Beauty etc.

We talk about mountains a lot, we use them as allegories or word pictures. We speak of mountain top experiences. We speak of climbing mountains. We acknowledge that climbing such involves hard work, preparation but the view from the top is worth it. We know that from the top we get a new perspective, a wider perspective and a clearer view of all.

Our scriptures have a bit to say about mountains. They play a significant role. Isaiah talks about the mountains and hills bursting into song and the peace mountain. Throughout the scriptures we see they are the place of encounter with God, for Jesus they are the place to which he withdraws.

I want to think this morning about three moments on mountains in our scriptures. Moments that offer to us insight for living.

The first moment concerns Moses. Moses had a couple of encounters with God on mountains. This time he is given a message for the people. A message that gives them the key to living, a way of understanding what is important in life. Starting of course with God. That to get a true perspective in life you need to put God first. What follows

then is a list of how to treat people, how to treat the rest of creation and even how to treat aliens/strangers and importantly how to rest. This list known to us as the ten commandments, has stood the test of time, most of our legal system to this day has as its basis these instructions.

So my first mountain moment is when God via Moses gives the people the standards by which they should live.

The next moment I want to think about is on a mountain with Jesus and three of his fishermen mates. Jesus often withdrew to a mountain top to give himself some space, to perhaps re-orientate himself, to steel himself for what might be to come. On this occasion he takes Peter, James and John. At the summit they are dazzled by a transformed Jesus who it appears is talking to Moses and Elijah. The fishermen are amazed and want to capture this moment for ever, I guess this is where we get the idea of a 'mountain top' experience from. But there is more, a cloud appears and they hear a voice from heaven with a word and instruction - this is my son whom I love and with whom I am well pleased -listen to him. Terrified they fall to the ground. When they get up, everything has disappeared and they are sworn to secrecy. What's more they find out very quickly that what awaits them on the ground is where both the hard and important work is. Upon their descent they are greeted by a sick boy whom none of them could cure. When they asked Jesus why - he says it was a question of faith, if they had faith the size of a mustard seed then they should be able to move mountains.

So my second mountain moment is a reminder that we must engage with the everyday and ordinary and cannot stay up the mountain marvelling in an ecstatic moment.

My next moment is the picture of Jesus teaching the crowds in what we have come to know as the Sermon on the Mount. The first part of this is full of encouragement, full of blessing. Following God's way is not without its trials, indeed just living, as we have learnt in the last couple of years, but have always known, is not without its trials. Here Jesus both reminds the crowds of what is important in walking the way of Jesus - mercy, justice and righteousness, peace and then offers a word of blessing, a word of promise to those following him. A word of blessing to us as well - live like this and you will be children of God, yours will be the kingdom of heaven.

Someone who knew this and lived this was Martin Luther King Jr. In his final speech given the night before his assassination he is calling people to work for justice for all, as he called for justice for the local sanitary workers. Knowing his cause was causing trouble and some people had him in his sight he uttered these words.

*"Well, I don't now that will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop. ...
...I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man (sic).
Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."*

Lift your eyes to the mountains. May you find God there, giving you rules for living, giving you encouragement and help for these days. Amen.

¹ Final speech from Martin Luther King Jr