

PASTOR JANNEKE'S PAGE

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, SIOUX FALLS, SD

FEB. 25 & 26, 2017

COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

This past week, I was blessed with what you could call a “mountain top experience.” There are a couple reasons for this: I spent the week in a beautiful valley in Arizona’s high desert, surrounded by mountains. I was also at a Christian retreat center (“Standing Stones”) to serve as chaplain for a Shepherd’s Canyon retreat. Shepherd’s Canyon provides week-long retreats for professional church workers and their spouses. The week includes a combination of group, couple, and individual counseling facilitated by two Christian counselors. My responsibilities were leading morning and evening devotions, conducting the Sunday worship service, and being available for other spiritual needs, such as individual confession and absolution.

There were three couples at this particular retreat. They came from different states and different Lutheran church bodies, yet they all came with a common purpose: to seek God’s grace and healing and to deal with various wounds and pressures, both in ministry and in marriage and family.

Part of the “mountain top” experience for me was getting to know these other couples, as well as the counselors and retreat hosts. When you spend a full week together, you can become like a little family! The other blessing was seeing how these three couples made such progress. Through God’s Word and the insights of the counselors, the clients gained hope and confidence during the week. They took “tools” home with them to practice as they move forward. They also left some hurtful things behind. At our closing ceremony, the clients each placed a river rock at the foot of the cross in the prayer garden. The rock symbolized something they needed to leave behind: anger, old wounds, insecurities, guilt ... We kept coming back to the Good News that Jesus suffered for these sins and sorrows and that, in Him, we are forgiven and made new!

It was hard to leave, not only because we were leaving the beautiful scenery behind, but also because we had to say goodbye to our new friends in Christ. Yet as we shared one of our meals together, one of the pastors pointed our hearts ahead to the eternal day when we will gather at the Lamb’s high feast in heaven!

There are many times in life when we need to come down the mountain. I had to literally leave the mountains of Wickenburg behind to head back to Mesa and fly home. We come down from “mountaintops” when we return home from vacations

and getaways. Our youth have experienced this in returning from National Youth Gatherings.

Can you think of a time in your life that you didn’t want to end? Maybe it was a family reunion, a journey to a tropical place, or a time when everything at work or school was going smoothly. It’s human nature to wish we could bottle up these “highs” and keep the good times going. Sometimes we wish we could do this with our faith, especially if we’ve had an emotional high like worshipping with our family by candlelight on Christmas Eve, or a Bible study or small group experience in which we felt particularly close to our Lord and one another.

Peter, James, and John know exactly what it feels like to come down the mountain. They were with Jesus on a high mountain (Matt. 17:1), possibly Mt. Hermon—elevation 9,166 ft.! Just the view would have been a “mountaintop experience”! But the disciples saw much more: they were eyewitnesses of God’s heavenly glory! They saw Jesus’ overwhelming majesty, just as He will appear in His final coming. We can only imagine this marvelous moment ... It’s no wonder that Peter wanted to stay put! He opened his big mouth and told Jesus that he wanted to camp out on this mountaintop and let the good times roll! Think about it: if you saw people from thousands of years ago resurrected like Moses and Elijah, wouldn’t you want to sit them down and pepper them with questions? If you caught one glimpse of Jesus’ unfiltered glory and beauty, would you ever want to look away? Who would want that wonder and excitement to end?

However, Jesus only intended to give a “sample” of His majesty to the three disciples. It was enough. His transfiguration demonstrated His identity as true God, but then Jesus had more important things to do. In the preceding passage, Jesus referred to His suffering, death, and resurrection as the things He “must” do for us (Matt. 16:21).

I’m so grateful that Jesus came *down* that mountain and headed toward Mt. Calvary, where He suffered for our salvation. And I’m so grateful that Jesus is *God with us*, both on the mountaintops, and also in the valleys that inevitably follow.

One day, we will enjoy a mountaintop experience forever: being with our Savior-God, face-to-face. Until that eternal day, whether we’re going through life’s emotional valleys or peaks, whether we’re falling apart or smoothly sailing, we trust His promise: He will never leave us or forsake us.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Kory Janneke