

Mountaintop OF MISSION

by Rev. Robert Selle

After His resurrection, the living Lord delivered to His followers, on the mountain where Jesus had told them to go (**Matthew 28:16**), what's often called "The Great Commission."

It's the great GO-Mission for each and every faithful follower of Jesus: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:18–20).

On this same mountain, after He had spoken with them one last time, Jesus returned from whence He'd come. He ascended into heaven. Scripture states, *While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven* (Luke 24:51). It was both an ending and a wonderful new beginning.

Read Acts 1:7–11

When He ascended to heaven, Jesus didn't really leave His followers. He loved them too much for that. Instead, He transformed his presence. No more would He be confined by geography, according to His human nature, but now He could be with all His people, everywhere, at all times, from this time forth and even forevermore! Before, when He was with Simon Peter in Capernaum, He couldn't enjoy the warm companionship of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. As He talked to Nicodemus on a Jerusalem rooftop, He couldn't at the same time be instructing multitudes in the wonders of the Kingdom on a mountaintop in Galilee. Now at last Jesus' confident promise could and would be fulfilled: "*Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20b).

The Bible tells us that Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight (Acts 1:9). For us in the 21st century, a cloudy sky only means a chance of rain. However, when St. Luke described Jesus' disappearance into a cloud, he used theological imagery that had clear implications for first century disciples, steeped as they were in the ancient history of God's people.

Read these passages aloud:

Exodus 13:21

Exodus 40:34

2 Chronicles 5:13–14

Psalms 68:4

Psalms 104:3

What did a cloud signify at these dramatic points in Israel's history? _____

One day, very soon, the glory of the Lord will appear once more in the clouds: read **Revelation 1:7–8** and **1 Thessalonians 4:16–17**.

Until then, God's people have an important job to accomplish, a vital mission mandate, a command to "*go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation*" (Mark 16:15). Scripture commands us to declare *his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples* (Psalm 96:3).

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus indicated to His followers both the *power* for this crucial mission movement, as well as its natural *progression*. It will look like ripples on a pond when a pebble is tossed in the water: Jesus said, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

What's the divine empowerment that God has given to His people? _____

To what might these place names refer, for you?

Jerusalem _____

Judea _____

(area residents who are culturally-similar)

Samaria _____

(area residents who are ethnically-distinct)

Ends of the Earth _____

There is so much joy on this mission journey, as God accomplishes His work of redemption through us.

A personal recollection of the author from his missionary years in the Philippines:

I'll always remember my first trip into virgin rainforests of northern Mindanao — a strenuous 25-kilometer hike over three mountain ranges, through a humid twilight-zone of towering lawaan trees. My companions were Evangelist Apolinar Tahoynon and the lay leader of our lowland Lutheran congregation in Talisay, Daniel Rayon. We hoped to share the Good News with residents of a remote Higaon-on village deep in the forest. The old chieftain, an old man with mouth reddened by betel-nut, welcomed us. His son, Datu Mandahinog, invited us into his home — a large bamboo structure that towered on tall stilts. Every night, we gathered there to talk about Jesus with the villagers and share stories from Scripture. Young and old listened intently, sometimes asking questions. But I didn't really know what impact the message was having — until late at night on the third day. A dozen of us stretched out on rattan sleeping mats spread over the split-bamboo floor. I don't know what time it was — sometime in the middle of the night. I was awakened by the quiet whispering of two people who lay next to me: Datu Mandahinog and his wife, Paulina. I knew it was rude, but I couldn't help but overhear their excited conversation:

"Before we were always afraid. We tried so hard to follow taboos," the chieftain said.

"We didn't know Jesus then," Paulina said in a quiet voice.

"But now we know Jesus. We know how much He loves us! His love caused His suffering, His death. Oh, yes, He loves us very much."

"Now we don't ever need to be afraid. We can be happy and not afraid."

"Yes, my happiness is very big today ..."

This joyful conversation went on and on. As I listened, I overflowed with thanksgiving.

As we step out on the special mission adventure that the Lord has designed for each one of us, it's important to remember that God goes with us, and His Word is powerful. Consider the following verses, and ask: "What guidance, instruction and/or support for our mission do these inspired words offer?"

Robert Selle has served as missionary in the Philippines, pastored three LCMS mission congregations, and for five years facilitated mission development in the North Wisconsin LCMS District. He also authored the LWML Bible study, *Figuratively Speaking: People Pictures of the Bible*. He dedicates this study to his "wife, Penny, my 'pikas nga kinabuhì' ('the other half of my life'), who has been an incredible blessing of God in the mission adventures we've shared together."

Luke 12:11–12 _____

Isaiah 55:10–11 _____

Romans 1:16 _____

Psalms 66:16 _____

Hebrews 13:6 _____

How blessed are we to have this Gospel to share! And until that Great Day of the Lord, we have Jesus, our Best Friend, walking with us every step of the way on our mission journey through life. Enjoyment of mountain travel is multiplied when you have a companion at your side with whom to share the vistas. Praise God we do not hike the hills and valleys of this life without a Big Brother at our side.

A personal recollection of the author from his missionary years in the Philippines. (Pastor Taran currently serves as professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines.)

Rev. Teodorico Taran is a pastor of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines. Besides his congregation in Linamon, he served a mission outstation high in the mountains. It was a half-hour hike from the end of the road. Each week, Pastor Taran visited this place to lead worship and conduct Bible-teaching, usually in the company of several other members of his city congregation who made the trip with him. One Sunday, however, it was only Pastor Taran. He approached the little bamboo chapel to find a group of people already gathered and waiting. Concern showed in their faces as he approached. It's dangerous to travel in the mountains alone. There are bandits, steep slopes, rushing rivers, landslides. With obvious anxiety, they asked "Did you come by yourself?" Pastor Taran smiled and said, "No, there were two of us." The people squinted back down the trail, but saw no one. Their foreheads wrinkled in puzzlement. Pastor Taran added, "You can't see Him, but Jesus walked with me every step of the way." Slowly, smiles dawned across the faces of the gathered crowd. Yes! This was one of the truths they were beginning to discover from the Bible: our loving God walks with us every single step of life's way!

*Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
God tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!*

Sharing Time

Describe a mountaintop experience you've had when you shared the Good News with someone.