

**Beyond the Mountaintop – Youth Sunday
Luke 9: 28-36
Daniella Emrich and Audrey Benfer**

Audrey

Some of the greatest times of my life have been my experiences through this church. On retreats, mission trips, or Sunday services are when I am at high points in my faith; I feel like I am at the peak of my happiness and surrounded by love and support. The women's retreat, for example, is a highlight of my year every year, and I am very excited to go back again at the end of this month. Getting to know and spend time with amazing women, including my mom, grandmother and some of my closest friends, makes me feel empowered and confident. Also, listening to Shannon Cassidy's and Ann Hatfield's powerful words on God and worshipping with these women for a whole weekend is a truly unforgettable experience. On the last morning of my first women's retreat two years ago, I remember sitting in the worship room looking out at the Chesapeake bay and listening to Mrs. Cassidy talk about the beatitudes, and how we can take what we learned and experienced into our everyday lives. And at that moment I realized that in a few hours I would have to pack up my things and go home, and that the next day I would have to go back into the daily grind of school and work and testing and stress. I wanted to save the moment I was in forever.

Dani

In the transfiguration text that we read earlier, Jesus is praying with Peter and John, when suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear. Peter and John are astonished, and they are dazzled by the glory of Jesus and these men. They offer to build dwellings for them, trying desperately to get them to stay. Unfortunately, Moses and Elijah do not stay, and Peter and John are forced back into everyday life, keeping silent about the wonders they had seen. The next day, Jesus heals a possessed boy when his disciples could not, for they did not have the faith to be able to. I think that a lot of us are like Peter and John in this situation.

Audrey

We feel the highs of life, surrounded by love and Jesus' presence, but when we are back in the normal routine of life, we forget how we felt and are unable, or unwilling, to help those around us just because we aren't at a high point. While we may not encounter a situation quite like the one Peter and John found themselves in, we do regularly encounter situations in which sharing the love of God that we felt in the high points of life can greatly help those around us. Whether a friend is hurting, or we witness hunger and homelessness, or violence and bullying, changing the love that we felt at the high points into a love that we can share with others, to lift up and spread the word of God, helps the low and mediocre days of feel more like the highest points. Instead of trying to never leave our highs, if we take the love that we felt into our everyday lives, the lows don't have to feel as low and we can benefit those around us as well. However, this is much easier said than done.

Dani

I spent the last 7 years going on retreats with this church. Learning and experiencing god in a whole new, powerful way. Through the friendships I made or strengthened I always left feeling closer to God. When I would leave it was like walking out of a fog. The retreats were like a shield and safe place from the world where I felt closest to God. This year the experience was very different, for good or bad I have yet to fully understand. I was just waking up on my last day of my last ever retreat feeling so blessed to be there, when I received the news that a very close friend and mentor had passed. Instantly that shield and feeling of protection snapped, like the glass I saw the world through had shattered. I went to the darkest place in my mind. in the moment nothing could comfort me. I wailed and could barely compose myself. It's hard for me to accept but I questioned God's love and power for the first time that day. I heard the word of the lord and the speakers interpretation but that day I was angry. I asked " Why her? Why now? This isn't fair" and honestly I felt that way for a while. That loving feeling I had usually felt from God was not there. It took talking to many close friends and family members to understand that I was going to be ok and could get through this, I HAD to get through this to be there for my friend who lost his mother.

My view on God's love and his plan for us forever changed . While he does protects us, that doesn't mean we will be untouched by harm. But his promise is that he will never leave us alone. God loves us so much that he is not only there with us in those almost untouchable moments, but also with us when we need him the most, when we hurt the most.

Audrey

Taking what we learn and experience during those high moments in life and transferring them to our everyday lives is what we are called to do as Christians. But we feel helpless, alone and abandoned when we leave those times that are the height of happiness. When we go back to hardships and reality of life, sometimes it can be difficult to keep our faith strong and be easy to get caught up in the anger and spite in the world.

This happens to me every year on the mission trip to Mexico, in which a truly amazing week always ends with the harsh reality that we have to leave that wonderful place of worship, love, and hospitality and get thrown back into routine. There are many other times when I feel this as well, on vacations, on weekends, or when spending time with family. When I feel happy and surrounded by love, I never want it to end, and having to go back to average days and low points is difficult. This is when we need God the most, not up on the mountain top surrounded by everything good, but instead when we need to show strength in times of adversity.

We can not isolate ourselves in the pure, untouchable feeling that we and the disciples felt on the mountain top. That doesn't benefit anyone. We need to learn how to transition back into everyday life and bring the love we felt into the ordinary. We need to be able to maintain strength in our faith in order to not only keep ourselves feeling sane, but also in order to help others deal with the lows of their own reality.

Dani

I found God in a more profound and personal way. He helped me to cope and feel the light again. I experienced that feeling of help from one of the band members this year right before leaving the retreat. I was visibly upset, sitting in the back of the room when I felt a tap on my shoulder and was given a piece of paper. I opened it, and inside was a note telling me that she sees my struggle and fight and knows that God has a plan for me and that whatever I was going through I would be able to make it through. It then finished with a Bible verse. Just that small bit of light from God shown through a stranger helped start the healing process. While in the moment it still hurt just as bad, I find myself even now returning to that note when I am feeling low just to find the smallest bit of comfort. For I now see God's love in a different light. You cannot see how bright something is without a little bit of darkness, but all you need to come out of the darkness is a little bit of light. I felt both of these throughout this experience.

Audrey

Just like Peter and John, we tend to see the world as either light or dark, highs or lows, but each is not without the other. In order to make the world better and more bearable place, we must learn to trust in God that we can bring the light we feel on the mountaintops into the dark spaces of reality, and make the mundane feel extraordinary. Amen.