

Easter 1

Mountain Path To The Resurrection

By Rev. Mr. Bill Baker
St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, or

Back in 2009 I took on the most grueling task I had ever ventured to explore. It took a lot of planning, dedication and training...if this venture was going to be worth it I had better make sure I knew what I was getting into. This grueling task..? to climb My Shasta.

I started out from the trailhead at 10:00 pm on a full-moon with temps below freezing. The climb is only 5.5 miles to the top but, it's the 7,300 feet in elevation gain over snow and ice that raises the stakes. I started out in a positive mood with grand expectations, taking lots of pictures by the light of a full moon and enjoy the prospects of the days journey to the top of one of the most famous mountains in the United States. But soon I find that the journey getting more challenging...and the cold is setting in, the grade is increasing and my pace is slowing...I'm midway in and I know the hardest part is about to be upon me...nevertheless I trudge forward.

Another set of hours slowly pass by...I am freezing and my energy reserves are about depleted. I am ready to give up, but the pinnacle is in sight, I can see the climax of my journey...I've come this far...I must see it through. And I do see it through and my elation is high! I stuck to it and didn't give up despite the adversities. I spend some time on top and take in the beauty around me and reflect on all the challenges I overcame to get here. But soon, my reflections of glory are besought with the realization that the moment is over. I made it to the top and now I'll I wanted was to be in the comfort of my home. It took me 10 hours to climb to the top and only 5 to climb down. I had accomplished my goal and my focus was now my own comfort, good food and a warm bed.

This first Sunday after Easter is often called 'low Sunday'. We reached the pinnacle of our Lenten Seasons feeling like "we made it"...Christ is risen...no more to do here...think I'll take some time off from church and get back into my comfort zone...pat pat (on the back). Is this the right attitude?

Life can be seen as a series of journeys...some as easy as a walk through the

park and others that take you beyond what you think your capabilities. A climb up Shasta is grueling but, no more so than the journey we just went through together. You may not have realized it, but we have all just been on a journey...together...a grueling journey. And I wonder what your experience was. The Sunday's of the 'gesimas' was our time to prepare for Lent so that we may experience our ultimate victory with Christ in the Resurrection...the pinnacle of our excursion and our ultimate joy. But, while that was the high point...the journey doesn't end there.

We entered Lent with anticipation for an experience that we knew would take us to heights with unimaginable views...to sit with Jesus as he teaches, to be there as He performs miracles in our midst, to be in awe as we watch the Son of Man heal those who are broken. Ah yes...the journey begins with a sense of eagerness and adventure as we move forward with a happy clip talking and listening to Jesus...this part of our journey is full of expectation and comfort...we can rest, eat, make merry and laugh. This journey with Jesus is as beautiful as it is comfortable.

But soon the terrain began to change. Roman guards are looking for Jesus and the religious establishment is condemning the Son of Man of blasphemy! As the trail steepens it becomes more dangerous to be a follower of Jesus...we are becoming aware of the cold, rocks loosening and tumbling through our midst...will we be caught up in an avalanche of public opinion and be taken away with Jesus. This journey is becoming more than we expected...will we be able to stay the course...will we turn back? Those, who were strong enough, sat with Jesus as He shared one last meal and gave to us His body and blood in the form of bread and wine to be an everlasting covenant that would extend to us Everlasting Life. And it is here that the fatal rock fell when Judas Iscariot betrayed his own Lord and gave up on the climb so close to the top...could he not see at least some of the wonderful view from this vantage point? Was he so tired that he gave up and just wanted to be back in the comforts of the world?

Next we find ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane being asked by Jesus to watch and pray. But the journey has worn us down and we are too tired and soon the rock that fell from the shadows plows through the garden and our Lord is gone from our sight. The struggle is getting close to unbearable, but we have come so far...we have no choice but to rely on our faith to continue our journeys...we can't give up on Jesus now, we've been through too much.

Many of us, willing to bare the abuse, stay with Jesus and continue our wilderness journeys. But, we have no idea the seriousness that still lies ahead. Jesus is taken away and condemned to death. He is beaten, mocked, spat upon and nailed to a cross. Jesus, creator of the world, savior of mankind, God with skin on His face...hangs on a cross as a common criminal. Our integrity and willingness to go the distance is about to reach the ultimate test when we hear the words of Jesus, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit...and he gave up the ghost*" (Luke 23:46). It is here just below the summit that we have to dig deep to find the strength to continue...to remember the words of Jesus and to rely solely on our faith. Or it is here where we give up, feeling that this journey is no longer worth the effort.

Following Jesus is not easy, but for those of us still willing to continue...we notice the air is getting thinner and every breath is becoming a labor in itself. Those of us who have invested everything in His words move ever forward and upward because His Grace strengthens our faith. And this is the point in our journeys where we are found to be faithful servants, trusting in the righteousness of God.

Isn't this exactly what we read today in our Epistle, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our **faith**. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that **believeth** that Jesus is the Son of God*" (1 John 5:4-5). Once we go far enough with Jesus nothing can take away our victory with Christ. We have taken that final step and reached the pinnacle, the summit of our faith! He is Risen and we are there...at the top...risen with Him! The One we followed, the One we believed, the One we trusted...did not lead us on easy paths around the summit, but led us through the dangers in spite of the hardships that laid ahead, and now...now we share with Him an everlasting life in the perfect presence of His love.

So, we have reached the climax of our Journey...what next? The rest of our journey seems a bit bland in comparison to what we just experienced. Like reaching the top of a mountain, we find that the end result of our triumph is a passing moment never to be experienced in the same way again. Is this all the Easter experience is...we have reached the Resurrection climax and its all downhill from here? Did we forget that our journeys started out in the dark? Look around you...we have reached the summit and it is midday! We can see more clearly than ever before and the sights are even more beautiful than when we first set out. Don't miss out on the rest of the

journey. A New Light is shining and our walks are made easier because of the New Light! We have Faith in the One who strengthens us...we have faith in the One who overcame for us...and we have faith in the only One who can offer forgiveness and set us free to enjoy the world he created.

The Easter celebration is over but our journeys are not. *“He that hath the Son hath life...”* (1 John 5: 12) our scriptures tell us. Now is the time to live life and live it more abundantly. Our journeys from the Resurrection back into the world are our opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and show others the path that leads to the summit of everlasting life. Go now and see the mountain in a new light and find joy in the rest of the journey.

In the name of he Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.