

SACRIFICING THE MOUNTAINTOP

Sermon given by Dan Phillips

At Caroline Valley Community Church

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2nd Sunday of Lent, 2011

Matthew 17: 1-9

¹And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." ⁸And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

We are now in the season of Lent. And the theme that we have selected for this season is SACRIFICE. This word comes from the concept of taking something that is ordinary (profane is the technical term) and making it 'sacred', that is, dedicating it to God. In a real sense of this word, we do this every Sunday when we give money to the church. We give our possessions, our money, to God, making our money SACRED instead of PROFANE. This is the meaning of SACRIFICE.

Over time, of course, we have subtly, yet profoundly, changed the meaning of this word. Now it has come to mean, as I recently heard it defined, as 'giving until it hurts'. It has come to mean giving up something that is so important to us that losing it causes us pain. And in addition to making the word more intense, more painful, we have come to associate it with the purpose. That is, we SACRIFICE something to gain something else. We SACRIFICE our time and effort to gain a better life, more money, a better home, or a bigger car. Some people SACRIFICE their lives to Christian service, dedicating themselves to God, becoming missionaries and witnesses around the world.

We have come to see SACRIFICE as something painful and total. Of course, this does relate to the Lenten season. We think of SACRIFICE during this time of the Christian calendar because of the SACRIFICE of Jesus on the cross. That was a SACRIFICE that was total, and very painful! But not all that we give to God is painful, or total. Sometimes, like in today's text, it is not a matter of giving until it hurts, but simply leaving the safe spot, the feel-good space.