

17Lift Up Your Hearts, Pt. 4
Mountains of Jesus
Matthew 4: 8-11; Luke 6: 12-13

**First Presbyterian Church
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In the movie *The Way*, actor Martin Sheen's character was happily playing golf on his afternoon off from his ophthalmology practice. Then this sunny day was interrupted by tragic news that his son had been killed while hiking in the Pyrenes mountains of France. The young man had set out on the *Camino*, the ancient pilgrim's way from the mountains to the coast of Spain. Sheen flies to France and has to decide, amidst his dismay, what to do with his son's body. The two had been estranged. Sheen thought his son's spiritual quest was a wild goose chase, merely postponing growing up and taking responsibility for his life. But in his grief, Sheen regrets their separation. He longs for his son. And so he decides on an impulse to walk the Camino for his son. He has the body cremated and puts the ashes in his backpack. Then this out of shape doctor in late middle age begins the arduous six week journey on foot. He is going to hike the Camino on behalf of his son. His son will achieve the pilgrimage vicariously, through the efforts of his dad. It is a poignant moment when Sheen gets his son's Camino book stamped "Complete" at the end of the quest. The beauty of the movie, of course, is that during this journey taken on behalf of his son, Sheen awakes again to God; he comes to terms with his relationship with his son and makes peace with his death.

A crucial concept in faith is to understand how Jesus undertook the human journey on our behalf. He took up a vicarious humanity. One man on behalf of all men and women. Most of us are familiar with how Jesus went to the cross on our behalf. He suffered the punishment due our sin. So we died and were condemned for sin vicariously, through the work of Jesus. He was our representative and our substitute on the cross. But quite often we do not consider how Jesus entire life was lived in our name and on our behalf. The eternal Son of God entered the world through the virgin's womb. He became a man who lived, prayed, served, and worked as the man for all men and women. What he did, all of what he did, he did for us. What we said and did remains available to us with present power.

In a real sense, Jesus was the start of a new kind of humanity. Whenever we see Jesus doing something in the gospels, we are seeing the new Adam at work. Whenever we hear Jesus speak in the gospels, we are hearing the man for all men and women, the start of a new human race speaking to us and for us. This is a wild

way of thinking, but it's crucial for growth in Christ. We grow as we participate in the vicarious humanity of Jesus.

This helps unlock the two stories we are taking up today. The first story took place right after Jesus has been baptized in the Jordan. The sinless Jesus took a sinner's baptism because he was representing us. When he came out of the water, the Father said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Here is the man who is truly in the image of God the way we were intended to be. Here is the man who is not only the son of a human mother, but the Son of God. He's the new kind of man, a man restoring the lost boys of the human race to full sonship.

Right after this confirming moment, Jesus went into the wilderness. There he fasted for forty days, and after that his Father allowed him to be tempted by the devil. The new Adam would have to face temptation just like the old Adam faced temptation in the Garden of Eden. If the new Adam fell, our hope for a new chance would be lost. Our hope to be part of a new kind of humanity, a restored humanity truly in the image of God, would have vanished. Jesus went to be tested representing all our hopes.

In the third temptation, the devil took Jesus up a high mountain. There he gave Jesus a vision. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory spread out below him. Then he spoke, "All this can be yours. Glory without a cross. Power that cannot be resisted. Rule that cannot be thwarted. Subjects who do what you want, and what you want is best for them. All you have to do is worship me." The devil tempted Jesus to skip the years of his ministry, to skip the trial and the passion, to skip the suffering and have the kingdom of God by force. All he had to do was close off his relationship with his heavenly Father. All he had to do was deny that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Satan spun a delusion. "Get what you want; the price is merely your heavenly Father. But who needs God when you have yourself? Why be shrunk down to his rules and regulations. You can become bigger and greater when you throw him off and side with me. Just don't look up; look down at my feet, look at yourself and all this is yours." Living for yourself, by your smarts and on your terms is exactly what the great adversary wants. For enthroning oneself as the judge and measure of all things is actually the equivalent of worshipping the evil one. And of course if the man for all men had done that, he personally might have grown great in the world, but we would have been lost. We would have continued as slaves to sin. We would have stayed lost and cut off from our Father. We would have remained

ruled by the tyrant who appeals to our vanity but never delivers the life and freedom and glory for which we were made.

So speaking on our behalf, the new man replied on the mountain of temptation: “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” The man for all men and women blew away the intoxicating illusion. “Life is found only in my Father. I only become the unique creature I was made to be when I conform to the will of the Father for me. I only find true freedom in his service. Joy is found only in praising him. Apart from him I shrivel and shrink. Bowing before him I grow eternally in my capacity for life and love.” Jesus kept questing upwards for his Father. He denied the downward look toward the world, the flesh and the devil. So on our behalf he kept open the connection between the heavenly Father and his Son on earth. He kept the direction of humanity upwards.

Not long afterwards, the time came for Jesus to choose his inner circle of twelve disciples. These would be the men into whom he would pour the majority of his time. He would teach them the meaning of the Scriptures. He would show them the mission of the Kingdom. Before he designated them as the twelve, Jesus withdrew to pray. Luke tells us that Jesus went up on a mountain. He left the houses and the farms behind and went up above the distractions of daily life. He gave up a night of sleep to be in his Father’s presence. He continued in prayer all through the small hours.

One of the most influential writers for me these days has commented on Jesus’ prayer life. Father Raniero Cantalamessa oozes an intimacy with Christ born of a combination of deep prayer, extensive scholarship, joyful worship, and long service to Christ’s church. Father Raniero notes that the picture of Jesus praying to his Father is *magnetic* to us. We are drawn to this sight. The intimacy tugs at our hearts. We stare in wonder that a man can be so connected to God. We see the beauty of this shining closeness. Why is that?

Have you ever felt a sense of wonder when you look at a star and realize how far that light has travelled to reach your eyes? You tingle to realize that you are looking back in time thousands or tens of thousands of light years. Recently we have been atwitter as the discovery of gravitational waves emitting from black holes. Scientists say we are looking back to the beginning of our cosmos. It’s awesome to consider. But looking at Jesus praying to his Father, we are reaching even further back! From eternity the Father and the Son have been loving one another in the bonds of the Spirit. The communion of Father and Son in the Spirit is the heart of God and therefore the heart of the universe. The overflow of that

love is the reason the universe we know came into being. In his days among us, we saw the eternal Son of God relating to his Father as he had from all eternity. But now he was doing it from among us, as one of us. Now the Son of God was engaged in intimate prayer to his Father as the man for all men and women. His everlasting relationship with his Father got earthed. He prayed from our midst as one of us. Jesus in his prayers was opening up the channel between God and humanity that had been lost. He was including our humanity in his communion with the Father. We see that nourishing, radiant intimacy between the man Jesus and his heavenly Father and think, "I want in on that! I want to know God like that." And the man for all men and women says, "You can. I have become what you are, so you can have what I have!"

There on the mountain of prayer, Jesus was enfolding his disciples into his relationship with his Father. Jesus and the Father were exchanging love for these twelve. They were exchanging plans for them. They were working out how the world would be changed by what they did in these twelve. Countless myriads of men, women, boys and girls would come to be taken into Christ through the gospel preaching begun by these disciples.

What Jesus and the Father exchanged on that mountain of prayer over those they called continues to occur throughout the world. If you are in Christ, know this: Jesus and his Father are in continuing conversation about you. It began before the world was made. It continued through your conception when you were woven together in your mother's womb. It sang between them when you were taught the gospel. It rose in joyful tones as faith was born in you. It continues as the Father, Son and Spirit work and plan for your complete transformation from the old Adam to the new Adam. Even now the Father and the Son are in conversation over you, sending the Spirit to revive your heart, open your ears and awaken your mind.

That is far from my usual experience of guilty and distracted prayer. That's a long way from my usual thoughts about who God is and what his intentions are for me. But isn't it time we blow away the devil's illusions and get in on the truth? How often do we think that prayer is like being sent to the principal's office? I'm going to arrive in an intimidating place before someone who is ready to name all the things I have done wrong and express what will happen to me. I only go to the principal's office because I have no choice. I have to get it over with to get on with life. I pray so I can be told how disappointed God is with me, say I'm sorry and hope I get a fresh start. Not the best incentive.

How different would it be to think of prayer this way: The Spirit of God within me lifts me to the presence of God. I discover that the Father and the Son are already in a conversation about me. The Son says to the Father, “Abba, Father, I delight to be in your presence. And I have brought you gifts. Look what I have for you. See this boy Dawson? You gave him to me. I came to earth for him. I lived and died for him. I clothed him in my righteousness. And now I have sent my Spirit to take him into myself. Now his Spirit cries out to you through me, “Abba, Father!” Doesn’t he shine now? I have undertaken to change his heart to love us for eternity. Can’t you see how our Spirit is working in him? He isn’t finished yet, so keep pouring our Spirit through him. Keep giving him to me. But be pleased with him, Father, for I have given him all you have given me, and now I’m giving him back to you. I praise you that he is fearfully and wonderfully made. And fearfully and wonderfully made new. I praise you for this great plan of salvation.” That’s a conversation I wouldn’t mind overhearing. That’s the conversation that’s going on in the heavenlies over those who have been joined by faith through the Spirit to the new Adam, the man for all men and women.

So how can I become more aware of that? How can I get in on the prayer life of Jesus? The disciplines of the Christian quest for Christ are meant to open up space in our lives for God. God’s Word expands our inner capacity to see how the Father, Son and Spirit are working in us. That’s why it’s so important to be praying these psalms every day. They open up our narrow focus. The psalms have such an emotional range that they make us aware of things going on in our lives beyond the immediate awareness of whether or not we are physically comfortable. When we consider how Jesus took up the psalms as his own, we discover that praying the psalms takes us into the intimacy of Jesus’ prayer life with his Father. Each day as we pray these psalms considering Jesus’ praying these same psalms in specific circumstances of his life, we get space opened in us for his life. The Spirit works a wonderful intimacy in us as we pray the psalms. We get in on that conversation between the Father and the Son.

Let’s close by taking just one line from a psalm you read this week, Psalm 27. It closes, “Wait for the LORD. Be strong, and let your heart take courage. Wait for the LORD.” On the mountain of temptation, the devil wanted Jesus to make a deal right away. Don’t think about it. Don’t pray. Just get what you want right now from me. But imagine Jesus who had been praying the psalms for forty days, turning over to this page in his mind. “Wait for my Father. Be strong. Take courage. Wait for my Father’s plan to unfold.” Imagine Jesus on the mountain of prayer choosing his disciples taking up this line. He didn’t want to pick rashly. He

wanted to discern who the Father had already given him. Wait for my Father. Be strong. Take courage. Wait for the Lord.

Waiting on the Lord in prayer opens up space in us for relationship. When we discover how Jesus waited on his Father for guidance and strength, we realize how our own prayers get taken up in his life. The man for all men and women includes us in his prayers. He prays with us. Wait for my Father. Be strong. Take courage. Wait for my Father.

The man for all men has undertaken a mighty work in your life. The Father has given you to the Son and the Son is giving you all his righteousness. Because he gives you his own Spirit. He is opening up to you all the intimacy he has with the Father as a man on our behalf. He is presenting you back to the Father as his love gift. He presents you in himself. Father, wait for this. Look what I have done in these my people. I have made them shine for you.

Wait on the Lord, this week beloved. Wait by joining your prayers to Jesus' prayers. Give him space so that you can see what he is up too. The man for all men has undertaken to save you and make you like himself. He will do it!