

Jesus comes down from the mountain 16-Feb-25

One of the things that we notice as we drive through the towns and villages, is that invariably the Catholic Church is on the highest part of the town or village, closely followed by the Anglicans, then the renamed Methodist who of course are us now the Uniting Church. This follows the ancient tradition that the place of worship happened on the highest part of the town or village, because at the time, it was symbolically considered closer to the heavens, allowing them to be nearer to their gods, in our case closer to God the Creator.

However, it goes deeper than that, a prominent place on a hilltop also allowed the place of worship to be easily seen from the surrounding area, speaking of the importance within the community. We know from Jesus' transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, with disciples Peter, James and John up on a mountain the experience brought them closer to God. After the experience Jesus knew, Peter, James and John would have to descend down from the mountain, onto the level ground and speak about what they had seen. Jesus fully understood the importance of being amongst the people.

That brings us to our focus for today. Jesus had been walking on the higher ground and now he comes down to sit and preach with the people at the foot of the mountain where the ground was more level. The image created is one of everyone sitting together, Jesus sees the needs in all people. So, we find Jesus addressing a very diverse crowd of people from various walks of life, offering his wisdom and teachings that are meaningful to those who have stopped to listen, or intentionally come to listen with an open mind and a receiving heart. He shares a series of blessings and woes that challenge conventional ideas of what success and fulfillment will look like.

Once again Luke invites us to reflect on the nature of community in a world where people find themselves in different spaces. Some in the lows of despair and others on the mountaintops of prosperity, and others who are standing still not knowing which direction to take.

The imagery of living rough and experiencing the love, grace and hope in Christ is a very powerful inspiration. To know it is possible to rise above your circumstances is very uplifting when you're feeling your worst. When we think about the inequalities in our world, it becomes clear that not everyone has the same opportunities to rise above their circumstances and thrive. Those who are at ground level may be battling poverty, injustice, discrimination, or personal struggles. While those on the mountains may enjoy privileges that isolate them, their isolation enables them to remain insulated from the hardships of others. This disparity raises critical questions about the viability of community – how can people with such diverse experiences nurture genuine connections and support one another?

At first glance, the presence of opposites suggests that community isn't just something which is challenging to us but could be expressed as impossible. Individuals in the low times feel a different kind of isolation. They're usually unseen, unheard and irrelevant by those who are in the spotlight sitting comfortably in the perceived higher echelons of society. In contrast, those on mountains have a greater potential to become quite comfortable and arrogant in their ideologies, and status, which is affirmed by their peers and acolytes. Often the people who sit in that space are unaware of the struggles below or even disinclined to properly engage with those outside their sphere of comfort and affirmation. This dynamic creates a disconnect which hinders the development of meaningful relationships.

However, what Jesus teaches us in Luke is a radically different perspective inviting us to reconsider how community can thrive amidst these differences. The blessings Jesus graces on the poor, hungry, and mourning is a clear indication of the love God has for the poor and marginalised. Jesus isn't blind and doesn't isolate himself to those who are suffering all manner of indignities. Jesus' passionate words of comfort reassures each of us that we are all invited to take and eat the Holy Meal, equally deserving of God's grace and mercy, love and equally given hope for our future. This promise serves as a call for those on the mountaintops to take the journey down the rocky and unsteady pathway to intentionally engage with and uplift those who are living with hardship and sorrow, transforming their aloof perspective cultivating empathy and equity.

Jesus' words urge us to understand that true community is built upon mutual recognition and support. It challenges the rich, and comfortable to step down from their positions of privilege and embrace those who are living with suffering, deprivations, and struggles. This call to humility can break down barriers, create space for unity rather than division cultivating an environment for a restored relationship with God and each other. Genuine community isn't just about how close we are together, it's about our heart-felt love, and seeing our hopes and dreams for each other coming into fruition.

To put it in practical terms, being a community together in a world which is full of political and religious hierarchy, even though many may deny it, requires us to be intentional. Those who have made the choice to follow Jesus are called to a life of listening deeply to each other's stories, to help each other with life's struggles, and to be the voice for those who are unseen, unheard, and considered too irrelevant; the vulnerable. This means creating spaces for the vulnerable in their low moments to be acknowledged and loved. Those who are living on mountains are challenged to recognise they have a role in creating a more equitable community. What we can encourage is to be led by words and actions indicating a genuine desire to bring about unity in the body of Christ, understanding and compassion goes beyond visual boundaries, rather than remaining blind to the needs of others.

When we involve ourselves, intentionally having our eyes, ears, minds and hearts open to the needs of others, we are engaging in reflecting on our own journeys – where we may find ourselves in our moments of hardship, ill-health, confused, or our moments of comfortably sitting on the mountaintop with our blessings. Our self-awareness allows us to recognise our

shared life experiences encourages those around us to nurture deeper connections within our community. As we are Christ's hands and feet in the modern era, we are also part of the process of bringing them to know what Christ has done already, can and will do for them.

One thing which is salient is knowing the actions within a community is broader than gathering together for social occasions; it embodies a commitment to one another's spiritual well-being. As Jesus modelled, lifting others starts with identifying what prevents people from connecting to their spirituality. 'rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.' On that day of transformation Christ will rejoice with you.

History shows that although there are those who sit on the highest level of the town or village, there is no escape from their actions, or being seen by the Spirit. Discipleship within the community amongst God's people is connecting people to each other as well as to their spirituality found in the love of Jesus Christ.

May I encourage you, each of us, to hear Jesus' words as words which reveal pathways towards connection with Jesus' love and hope, God's wisdom and the Spirit's joy. Jesus invites us into a transformative vision where the people who dwell on the lower plains and the mountains can coexist through love and justice. By nurturing an inclusive community that values each person's dignity and worth, as we reflect God's kingdom – a place where all are blessed, and all are welcomed into the abundant life that God envisions for us as we journey towards the promised land – the kingdom of God.

Amen