

## Does Faith Take a Vacation? Matthew 17:1-9

Two more days and school is finished for another year! Mom's and dad's are looking forward to some time off with the kids. Even retired folk are looking forward to connecting with people they have not seen for a long time, largely in part because of the COVID restrictions. But travel has opened up a little, and we are ready to take a vacation...

I know Lise and I are anxiously awaiting the day we can make the journey over the water to see our kids, and very soon, to see our first grandbaby! We can hardly wait!

It is great to hear all the plans people are making to camp, see loved ones and to get some well-deserved rest. There are a lot of grumpy people out there and I think a vacation will do them good!

So will we put our faith on hold during the summer, or will we continue to seek the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Will we keep our eyes on Jesus or will we let them wander to pleasure and worldly distractions?

In the passage Xiao read for us this morning we have Jesus taking three of his disciples for a little get-away. He takes them to the mountain, away from the crowds and the demands of ministry. He takes them on a vacation.

It appears that the disciples needed it, because Luke reveals in chapter 9 that while on the mountain we have Jesus praying, and the disciples sleeping. They were tired, and they needed rest. Jesus allowed them the rest they needed.

Jesus, on the other hand, was drawing his strength and renewal by fellowshiping with the Heavenly Father through prayer. Yes, for Jesus, vacation time was a time for spiritual growth, not just R&R. Jesus did need to rest and renew, like all humans do, but he also made it a priority to spend time with God, even on vacation!

Well, as Jesus prays and the disciples sleep, two things happen. First, Jesus "transfigures." This means that Jesus no longer appeared as he usually did, but now "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light." (v. 2).

For a brief moment the glory that Jesus had with the Father in heaven broke through, and we get a glimpse of the God who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16).

As we read this, we cannot help but think of Moses whose face shone after he spent time with God in the tabernacle. Being in the presence of God changes a person. Nicky Gumble, pastor and developer of the ALPHA program, recounts how, when he was a not a believer, he noticed people with faces that glowed. They seemed full of joy and hope and he avoided them at all cost. These were the Christians who had been in the presence of God!

The second thing that happened on that mountain retreat was two figures from the past come to encourage Jesus – Moses and Elijah.

Jesus has just announced to the disciples that he was heading to Jerusalem, and there he would be arrested and killed, but on the third day would rise again. Jesus knew that what lay ahead for him was going to be very painful and difficult. But he also knew it was necessary, as this was the purpose for which he came. He would give his life so that he could bring salvation to all who would repent of their sin and receive by faith forgiveness and new life in him.

Moses and Elijah were sent to encourage Jesus that he was on the right path. Moses represented the Law, and Jesus came to fulfill all the Law. Elijah represented the prophets, and they spoke of Jesus and his mission. It is in the prophets we read words like:

But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

What a blessing for Jesus to have these men come and affirm him on his mission.

It is at this point that the disciples wake up. Imagine the start they had when they see Jesus glowing like the sun, visiting with two men who also “appeared in glorious splendor” (Luke 9:30).

Peter speaks up, and his plan is simple: make three shelters there on the mountain – one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

Peter wants to pitch a tent, set up camp, light the fire and settle down for awhile. This vacation stuff was good and he wanted it to last as long as possible. Aren't we a little like that as well? When we get a vacation we want it to last as long as possible?

Who wants to deal with the problems of the people when you can get away on the mountain and hang out with Moses and Elijah? Who wants to face a cross and duty and responsibility when you can sit by the fire, sing Kumbaya, and enjoy being with your friends?

Peter wants to put his faith on hold.

I wonder how many people will leave their Bibles at home when they head out on vacation? How many people, out of the routine they have established, will miss their prayer times? How many will skip church Sunday morning? How many will not bow their heads in thankful prayer for the food because they are in a restaurant, or around a campfire? How many people will put their faith on hold while on vacation?

Of course, we should never put our faith on hold. We should always “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Peter and the disciples need to learn that truth, so when Peter suggests they set up camp and forget their ministry, what happens? A bright cloud covers them and out of that cloud comes a voice. It is the voice of God the Father who says,

“This is my Son, whom I love: with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” (v.5)

God was reminding the disciples that they must always keep their eyes on Jesus. Their faith, which had been shaken by the announcement that Jesus was heading to a cross, needed to be strengthened on this mini-vacation, not abandoned. And as the writer to the Hebrews says, they should keep -

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

The voice from heaven put the disciples into such a fright that they fell down on their knees and covered their faces. But Jesus comes to them, and touches them, and says, “Get up. Don’t be afraid.”

And when they looked up they saw Jesus only.

May that be what happens for us during our vacations. Whether we go to the beach, the campground, our relatives or Disneyland, may we look up and see Jesus only. May we be drawn closer to Jesus during our vacation, not drift away. May you come back after your holidays not only refreshed physically, and emotionally, but spiritually as well.

The last time I hiked the West Coast Trail I met a man who was celebrating his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday by hiking the 75 km trail – twice! He hiked alone and traveled very light. But conquering the trail was not his only objective. He was praying for the other hikers, and sharing his faith with them. He had prepared a special tract for the trail, he wrote it himself, and handed it out to those who would receive it. He kept looking for Jesus on the trail...

Often the group I hiked with contained several pastors. Every morning we enjoyed reading a scripture together and praying before we set out. At night we shared in conversation around the camp fire, and enjoyed the company of friends. Other campers saw our group, and many made their way to our campfire. We welcomed them and told them our stories of who we were and our faith journey. Many who joined the fireside chats knew little of our faith. Some would bring a bottle of alcohol and offer to share it with us, a gesture of friendship. We explained that was not our lifestyle. We expected they might be put off by that refusal, but the next morning as we gathered for scripture and prayer, guess who asked if they could join us? Faith does not take a vacation!

Our friend Henry is visiting from Abbotsford. This is a mini-vacation for him with business mixed in. Henry loves the outdoors and hiking, and is quite happy to be on our island. Often he will do exercises in the morning, following the movements of Tai Chi, and as he did that at Sway-a-Lana

Park he noticed that others were willing to follow him. Henry has always sought to put Jesus first in what he does, so his comment to me was, “Maybe I can lead the people in exercises at the park and invite them to church on Sunday!” Faith does not take a vacation.

I am not sure how you will make sure you see Jesus only, even on vacation, but remember this, “Your faith does not take a vacation.”

We are always Christ’s ambassadors. We are always his children. Jesus desires to spend time with us every day, and he waits for us to make time for him – even when we are on vacation.

Why not stop now and then, as you see the beauty around you and say “Thank you Jesus!” Why plan to memorize a passage of scripture – even while on vacation! Why not keep a journal of the “God encounters” you have while on vacation – and share those with the church family when you return.

Well, Peter, James and John got a glimpse of the glory of God in Jesus there on the mountain, on their little get away. If you keep reading in the chapter you notice they come down off the mountain to be confronted by a dad whose son has a demon. The disciples who did not go with Jesus have been trying to deal with the demon but are failing. Their faith was weak because they still were struggling with Jesus’ words about a suffering Messiah.

But Jesus rescues the boy, delivering him from the demon and setting him free. It was back to work...

I do not know what your summer looks like, but I encourage you to press in closer to Jesus during this season. Find ways to grow your faith, even while on vacation. I guarantee you that you will come home far more refreshed if you put Jesus first than if you put yourself first!

If you have children, point them to Jesus as well. I still remember with great fondness sitting in the tent with my sisters and parents while on vacation, listening to mom read to us scripture, or from Christian novels.

Faith does not take a vacation. Jesus will never be absent, so look for him in all you do. “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you,” is the promise of James 4:8.

Or as 1 Corinthians 10:31 says,

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Amen.