

**Descending from God's Glorious Mountain to Bless the World
based on Mark 9:33-41, David Jahnke, 7/26/15**

So this week you children have been climbing Mount Everest with Trek and Livy. Some of the disciples—the followers of Jesus—went up a mountain with Jesus too. The disciples were feeling really good after their mountaintop experience with Jesus where they saw him filled with wonderful light from heaven. They also saw two dead prophets—Moses and Elijah. They learned that Heaven was real. They disciples had reached a new high! And on their way down, they started thinking they must be pretty special to have seen that. And they started to wonder which of them was the greatest. That is a very natural thing to do.

Do you guys ever wonder who the best player or who the best dancer on the team is? Or who the smartest kid in the class is?

We might find it strange that Jesus' disciples would do this but this was not unusual then or now. Back in Jesus' day, there was a messianic Jewish sect like the Christians called the Essenes. They went out to live in the desert as the "true" chosen ones of God. And they ranked their group every year...Who was the best disciple, second best, third best etc.

It seems the disciples were thinking along similar lines. And even if we do not publicly do this, we often do it in our homes or in our private conversations with others. And even if we do not consciously express this, we feel this in our subconscious to greater and lesser degrees.

But Jesus says we do not have to compare ourselves to others. Because when we do that, one of two things happens. We either feel bad because it seems we are not as good as others. Or we make others feel bad because they are not as good as us.

Jesus wants something different. While the disciples were wanting to be considered great and high and mighty, Jesus lowered himself...and he took a little child into his arms and said "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

So Jesus is with the smallest, the weakest, the lowliest, the hurting, the least knowledgeable and powerful. And he touches them with his love and wisdom which makes them so strong and happy. And we all need this kind of love, no matter how old we are.

I have a quick example of this. We went to Seth and Dietrich's new piano teacher's house. And they have a dog that is about 9 years old. Now that might seem young but who knows how many dog-years that is? So this is no puppy. But this dog is just crazy for loving. Now I am allergic to dogs so he learned pretty quickly that I was Mr. Mean Human Being as I kept him at leg's length with my shoe.

But when Dietrich came to his first lesson, this dog was all over him—jumping on him licking him-- wanting attention, wanting to be scratched, played with, petted... This dog just loves being loved, even though he is almost a grandpa in dog years.

The same goes for you and me and your parents and grandparents. We never stop loving love. We love to feel and to hear and to know it. And that is why God sent Jesus— to show us how much God loves us and that he will never stop loving us. And the church is here to help us feel and hear love.

This is what you learned up on Mount Everest this week. God and all these people and Christians everywhere think you are awesome and will always love you. And now it's time to come down off of the awesome summit of knowing God's love and care and go to those who do not feel so awesome in order to show God's love and care.

And that means going down into valleys that we may not want to go to and doing things we may not want to do.

I watched a rockumentary about a Christian band called Switchfoot. And they travelled all the way to Australia to do a show. And their first show was a heavy metal festival. And heavy metal fans can look kind of scary. Some have tattoos all over their bodies...and strange haircuts and weird make-up. And most of them are not Christians. But the band goes to these festivals—and they play their loud music which the people can relate to but they go with a message of love and hope. And they know that many of the fans might not really be nice or like them or want them there. But they go because they believe God is sending them to people who can relate to them in some ways but really need to hear that message.

And we need to do the same thing. We need to go to people who are hurting and lost and relate to them which is what I want to talk about last with the adults. Because I think you already get this part. But try to keep listening.

Sometime after Jesus welcomed the child (who did not really know who he was), the disciples came and told him that someone who was not a follower of Jesus' was out healing others by the power of Jesus. And since he was not a follower of Jesus, the disciples wanted to stop him. He was not "one of them"; he was not in their group. But Jesus would not let them stop him. And he told them, "Anyone who is not against us is for us." And anyone who gives any child of mine a cup of water will be rewarded.

So the Love of God and faith in Christ do not separate us from others who believe differently; they actually connect us to them. Because their love and kindness and other virtues of non-Christians come from God just as ours do. Our faith teaches us this. And as long as they do not resolutely oppose Jesus— his love, grace, truth, peace and other Christian virtues— Jesus says they are for him.

Dr. Sharrett shared a great story about meeting a Hindi woman at a dinner event. And after a brief conversation, Dick said, "I want to tell you that I see Jesus in you." And with a smile she replied, "And I see God in you." This is the kind of exchange God is calling us to. And as we relate to others through shared commitments and values, we will learn about how the Spirit of Jesus whose works are more than everything that has ever been written in all the books in all of the libraries in the world, according to John 21— how that Jesus is at work in their lives and tradition as we share the heart of who Jesus is according to the Bible.

This begins with conversations within the church about these matters and then and only then will we start to move out into the world to have these kinds of conversations that God is calling the church to. All through the Spirit of the one who has reconciled all things on the cross and to whom belongs all the glory and the power, now and forevermore. And God's people say...

