

January 27, 2019  
Matthew 17:1-8  
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME  
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## ***On the Mount***

### INTRO to SCRIPTURE

We are in the third week of our Moses series. The first week we heard about the midwives for justice – Shiphrah and Puah – who tricked the pharaoh and let the newborn Moses live. Last week we encountered the burning bush where Moses is called by God to bring a message to Pharaoh – *Let my people go!*

Today we're going to take a break in the chronology of Moses story and reflect on the connections between Jesus and Moses, especially in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew who is writing to a Jewish audience includes many echoes back to the story of Moses. In many ways, Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses.

The one story, in Matthew, where Jesus and Moses are mentioned together is the story of the transfiguration – a story of great symbolism. So, let us hear that story again.

### SERMON

Jesus as the new Moses.

There are many connections between their two stories, especially in Matthew. I'll mention three:

#### 1. Danger in infancy.

In Moses story, the pharaoh sets out to kill all boys under two years of age in order to subdue the Hebrew people. But he is subverted; and Moses lives.

In parallel, Matthew, in Jesus' story tells that Herod sent out a decree to kill all boys under two years to be sure that there would not be any King of the Jews from that crowd. But Joseph is warned in a dream and the family become refugees to Egypt during the rest of Herod's cruel reign. In effect, both Moses and Jesus come out of Egypt, serving God's work of salvation in the world.

#### 2. The ritual meal.

The primary table ritual of the Jewish people, the Passover Seder, a meal including unleavened bread and wine, comes from the Exodus experience, as Moses led the people to freedom.

Matthew makes an explicit connection, saying that, at the last supper, Jesus and the disciples are eating the Passover, which becomes transformed into our communion.

#### 3. Moses and Jesus are both mountain men.

Moses goes up Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 commandments – or actually the 10 words – to guide the life of the people.

Jesus goes up the mount to share the sermon on the mount, which includes commentary on those 10 words, pointing out that these words should not only direct our behavior but they should shape our hearts, as well.

Today's story of the transfiguration is also a mountain top experience.

Where do you sense the presence of God?  
Some people tell me it's on the golf course.  
Others say it's in ancient cathedrals.  
Some go to their back deck.  
Others sit by the ocean.

In today's story -  
They go up the mountain.  
They go up to be close to God.  
People everywhere – throughout time-  
have gone up mountains – to be close to  
God.

Here in Maine people climb Mt. Katahdin.  
Each year around 15,000 start or end their  
time on the Appalachian trail at Katahdin.  
Another 35,000 come just to climb the  
mountain. For thousands of years native  
Wabanaki people have come to this  
mountain, experiencing it as a sacred place,  
a thin place as the Celts would say.

In today's story Jesus and the disciples  
Peter, James, and John go up the mount. In  
defiance of logic and temporality Moses,  
and Elijah appear. It is a mystical  
experience, with enormous theological  
significance.

Jesus and the disciples were Jewish. Two  
central people in their tradition were Moses  
and Elijah.

Moses lived 1,500 years before Jesus and  
was the great leader of the Hebrew people,  
assisting God in the salvation work of  
liberation from bondage.

Elijah lived about 800 years before Jesus  
and was a prophet who called people to  
faithful worship. According to tradition

Elijah didn't die but ascended directly into  
heaven. His return was understood to be a  
sign of the coming Messiah.

And here they are Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.  
For the Jewish community this represents  
the passing of the mantle from Moses and  
Elijah to Jesus – the Messiah – the saving  
one.

You might say this is Jesus' ordination  
experience. The blessing from heaven  
echoes the words from his baptism,  
*This is my Son, the Beloved;*  
*with him I am well pleased;*  
with one additional phrase:

*listen to him!*

God is sending Jesus to set all people free.

And the disciples? They are afraid. In fact,  
they are overwhelmed with fear and fall to  
the ground. Such experiences overcome  
our ego-structured sense of the world and  
set the world on fire. How will we live in  
such a world of dreams, visions, burning  
bushes and transfigurations?

In our Soul of Aging class this week, we read  
a poem on grief in which the poet said, *It  
becomes hard to trust yourself.* I  
commented that this phrase caught my  
attention because when my world gets  
turned upside down – by grief, by  
transfigurations – it is important for me not  
to trust my ego-self, who will be  
overwhelmed and resistant to what might  
be happening. I need to move deeper and  
deeper into trusting God's Spirit instead.  
Who knows what saving work God may do  
through me, through us!