

## “TAKE TWO TABLETS AND CALL ME LORD”

Exodus 24:12-18

February 19, 2023

Transfiguration Sunday

Across the street from my childhood home was a brown brick Methodist Church. It was a plain rectangular shape with a steep roof. Because it was set back on the property, there was a big front lawn which gave plenty of room for the neighborhood kids and I to play wiffle ball. We used the church sign as our backstop. We never hurt anything, it was a wiffle ball, but every now and then someone would pop out the door and shoo us away.

Besides the front yard, one of the things I liked about living across the street from this church is getting up on school mornings when it was foggy out. On some occasions, the fog was so thick I couldn't see the church building. For some strange reason, as a child, I was amazed at this atmospheric phenomenon. I just found fog to be eerie. The world looked and felt weird.

In science class we learned that fog appears when water vapor condenses in the atmosphere, which is usually caused by cold air moving over warm water. There are several different types of fog, including **radiation fog, advection fog, valley fog, and freezing fog**. As amazing as this natural phenomenon is, it does come with certain dangers especially if we attempt to drive through it. Another hazard that accompanies fog is that it increases the air humidity and decreases the oxygen levels in the atmosphere. If you are an outdoor runner, walker, or cyclist, fog makes it harder to breathe.

Even though fog is a little strange, I have always found it beautiful, especially when seeing it from a distance, or with the sun shining through, or fog rising from a lake or mountain. Speaking of foggy mountains, we find an example of this in our scripture passage this morning.

This particular passage follows a reading of the law, sacrifices, renewal of covenant vows, and a gathering of 70 elders along with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. They meet the Lord and have a feast on the Mountain. Afterwards, God invites Moses to a private meeting that takes place further up the mountain. When Moses ascends to the higher elevation a great cloud or fog covers the mountain, and Moses with it.

In both Old and New Testaments, the image of a cloud is used to indicate the presence of God. The idea was that God was both accessible and inaccessible, real and yet beyond, present but also transcendent. It is from the Jewish faith we reject the idea that God can be contained in any manmade image or idol. God is always bigger than we think. And yet, God dares to make God's self known. So, Moses, hikes higher up on the mountain and enters the cloud of God. Why?

### I. RULE OF LIFE

Perhaps some of you remember fitness guru Jack LaLanne. He is famous for putting exercise on the map for general population. He published numerous books on fitness and hosted the fitness television program **The Jack**

**LaLanne Show** from 1951 to 1985. As early as 1936, at the age of 21, he opened one of the nation's first fitness gyms in Oakland, California.

LaLanne is also famous for some of his publicity stunts showing off feats of strength.

- 1959 (age 45) – Did 1,000 [push-ups](#) and 1,000 [chin-ups](#) in 1 hour, 22 minutes, to promote [The Jack LaLanne Show](#) going nationwide.
- 1976 (age 62) – To commemorate the "Spirit of '76," [United States Bicentennial](#), he swam one mile (1.6 km) in [Long Beach Harbor](#). He was handcuffed and shackled, and he towed 13 boats (representing the 13 original colonies) containing 76 people.

LaLanne was one of the first voices who was recognized for publicly preaching the health benefits of regular exercise and a good diet. What you may not know is as a boy Jack was addicted to sugar and junk food. He also suffered from headaches and bulimia, and temporarily dropped out of high school at the age of 14. The following year, he heard a talk on health and nutrition from health food pioneer Paul Bragg and it changed his life.

Jack's routine was to get up every morning at 4 AM and worked out 2 hours, 90 minutes with weights and 30 minutes of swimming. He did this into his 90's except by then he was sleeping in until 5 AM. He ate two meals a day and avoided snacks. His breakfast, after working out consisted of hard-boiled egg whites, a cup of broth, oatmeal with soy milk, and seasonal fruit. For dinner, he and his wife typically ate raw vegetables, egg whites, and fish. He did not drink coffee or eat red meat. By the way, Jack lived until 96, died of pneumonia, but had done his 2-hour routine the day before, simply thinking his breathing problem would pass.

**The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there; I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."** Unfortunately, when we hear the words law and commandment we tend to think of religion in terms of religious legalism or a tit for tat relationship. It can turn our relationship with God into a contract where we do this for God and God does this for us. The opposite is you don't follow through on the contract then God enforces penalties. But that is not what is going on here.

God is giving Moses instructions, spiritual routines as practical ways for the Israelites to live out their life together. These regular routines would support their spiritual life and simultaneously help the people grow in their faith.

Just like Jack LaLanne had routines for his physical development, we need spiritual routines for our faith development. We are not going to make much progress in our spiritual lives if we are haphazard about prayer, scripture reading, worship, service, and so forth. We flourish best with some kind of structure to our lives or what spiritual directors call Rules of Life.

The caution is not to make these routines an end in themselves but a way to nurture the heart for God. God was giving these routines to Moses so he could teach them to the rest. Part of church leadership is doing this teaching

work on how people can set up and get the most out of their spiritual routines. (Shameless plug for Lenten Study – Sign Up).

## II. WAITING FOR GOD

Have you ever made a phone call to a company, government agency, or health care provider only to be put instantly on hold? Worse still, is to get one of the automatic answering machines, and be told that all server providers are presently busy, you will be connected with the next available person. Then you wait as you listen to bad elevator music with constant interruptions. Who wants to wait in telephone purgatory, especially if the need is urgent?

**“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for 6 days; on the seventh day God called to Moses out of the cloud.”**

Understand what is going on here. God tells Moses to come up higher into the foggy mountain. Moses obeys and then nothing. He sits in the fog for 6 days waiting for God to get back to him. I don't know about all of you, but I'm not sure I would have the patience to remain on the line for 6 days and sitting in the dark to boot. Didn't God care about Moses, after all God was the one who called. How rude to leave him hanging on the line!

But there is an important spiritual lesson here. It is simply this, we can't make God show up. We can't force God's hands. We cannot manipulate and make God into something we want. All we can do is wait in anticipation and prepare our hearts to receive whatever God has in mind.

Waiting is the spiritual discipline that tests our trust and our faith in God. Waiting doesn't necessarily mean we do nothing, but rather it is a time of preparation. It is a time of reflection, examination, and confession. It is getting rid of the spiritual junk that might be clogging up our lives; old grudges, resentments, sinful habits, past hurts, wrong perceptions, shame, and so forth. Also, waiting can be a time of prayer, thanksgiving, and meditation. It can give us permission to simply let go and trust that God has something in mind for us according to the Lord's own timing. By the way, waiting is a great way to prepare for worship, which brings me to my third point this morning.

## III. WORSHIP

Did you notice that Moses waits for 6 days, and it is on the seventh that God shows up? Does that remind you of anything? It should for the 7<sup>th</sup> day is the Sabbath day, the day we rest, and we worship God. Does anyone want to guess what the theme of the next 6 chapters in Exodus is? If you guessed **worship**, you would be correct.

For the next 6 chapters God gives Moses instructions, in great detail I might add, about the preparation for the Tabernacle, the tent of God's dwelling, the ark of the covenant, the items that go into the tent, and how sacrifices are to be carried out and by whom. By the way, this Tabernacle, tent of God was to dwell in the midst of the camp, much like churches were built in the town square and in some cities no other building was to be taller than the church. The idea was that God would be the center, the focal point of the community's life.

Here is what I want you to remember and wrestle with. God first gave Moses the 10 commandments and other instructions for community life. Then God gave Moses instructions for worship. But worship and the instructions on

daily life are not separate items. They go hand in hand. Let me put it another way. Our life is to be an act of worship. God is not an afterthought reserved for our morning devotions, nor worship just something we do on Sunday morning.

All our daily activities, even paying our bills, are to be lived out according to the instructions of God and to the glory of God. We honor God when we show kindness, speak truth, share our gifts, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, as much as when we sing praise songs, prayer, and break bread. While the actions may be different, if God is at the center, then we worship the Lord. Our doing and our worshipping are intimately linked together. Worship is active participation in the living relationship of the triune God.

The church I grew up in always held an Easter morning sunrise service. We joined with another Presbyterian church in town and met out on a farm with a small pond. Being we lived in northeastern Ohio, one never knew what the weather was going to be like at that time of year. We experienced, rain, sunshine, and snow, one time all on the same morning. Once, I remember trying to play guitar for that service and couldn't feel my fingertips, let alone the strings. In spite, of all the weather challenges we worshipped and celebrated the risen Christ.

There is very little we can do about the weather outside nor the weather in our lives. There are days when it snows, days of bright blue skies, and days when it rains. And sometimes the fog will set in. But, even on those days when we have to wait for things in our live to clear, and we feel lost and confused and alone, have faith God is at work. We don't need to be foggy about God's will to be at the center of our daily living. We can still worship and serve and be the community God has called us to. And that is the good news for this morning. Amen.

**First Presbyterian Church in Hawley**  
**Sunday, February 19, 2023**  
**Second Scripture Lesson**

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**Exodus 24:12-18**

<sup>12</sup>The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup>So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup>To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them." <sup>15</sup>Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup>The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup>Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup>Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**