

Second Sunday of Lent – March 1, 2015

There once was a holy man, so the story goes, who lived on a mountain top for 20 years. He meditated, fasted, prayed, and detached his soul from every vice. Finally, he was persuaded to come down from the mountain to teach his way of holiness to the people. When the Lord God got wind of his descent, he transformed himself into a hulking brute and waited at the city gate. When the holy man passed through the gate, this hulking brute bumped and jostled him. The holy man raised his stick in anger. The brute cringed, then spoke: “It’s easy to be a holy man on the mountain, isn’t it?”

In the popular understanding, being spiritual often means fleeing the world. The spiritual master, it is thought, lives on the mountain top, breathes rarefied air, but does not fare too well when he ventures into the village.

St. Peter’s statement of delight can be read in this way in today’s gospel. “Rabbi, it is good that we are here.” And he meant it! He also meant to keep a good thing going by settling there in 3 tents. What’s wrong with this scenario?

It would have been spiritually suffocating for Jesus. He would be isolated, cut off from the people he came to teach, heal, and serve. More importantly, staying put would have kept Jesus from his saving death and resurrection.

So, in effect, Jesus tells Peter to put away his tent dreams. It’s time to move down the mountain. Jesus knew that the divine plan would never be achieved by camping out on top of the mountain where all was cozy and rosy and secure. Just as Abraham was called out of the security of his only son, just as Moses was called out of his security in Egypt, just as Elijah was called out from his security in the cave of Mount Horeb, so Jesus was called down from the mountain on to a path of self-sacrificing love.

Jesus knows that self-sacrificing love (the only kind of love that makes a difference) will always make demands on us and shatter our security. There will always be one more cranky person to befriend, one more lonely person who needs a brother or sister in Christ, one more relationship that needs mending, one more sick or dying person who cries out for real presence.

Because of what we have seen on the mountain top, we can be transformed with Christ, to bring hope and compassion to those at the foot of the mountain.

Know this: the Lord Jesus walks with us at the foot of the mountain as we serve his brothers and sisters and ours. What the mountain top does is go with us, no matter where we are.