

Worship Brainstorming

“Mountaintop Stories: Where Heaven and Earth Meet”

An Epiphany series that explores “thin places” in our lives

Tues., Jan. 17, 2023 at LHUMC

12:00 p.m. Potluck

12:30-3:00 p.m. Brainstorming for Worship

February 5-19, 2023 (3 Sundays)

The worship brainstorming for this series will be held at LHUMC in the Lounge. Members of all ages and backgrounds are invited to participate in the one-time commitment. The ideas generated at the brainstorming are used in worship.

We will have a potluck at 12:00 p.m. Please bring a dish to share. Brainstorming is from 12:30-3:00 p.m.

More information is available at church and on our website. Please pick up the brainstorming packet (this document) at church, read the Scripture reading and Pastor Mary’s message synopses, and preview videos when they become available.

RSVPs are helpful but not mandatory. Sign up at church or contact the church office (213-798-2181 or Office@LakeHarborUMC.org) or Karen Booth.

2023 theme connection: Old and New Testament stories remind of God’s faithfulness. We can count on it today and in the future.

2023 Theme: Jesus is Our Past, Present, and Future Hope

2023 key Scripture verses: ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8: 38-39 (NIV)*

Major spoken/unspoken needs:

- It is so easy to not attend church when I can watch it online. Worship is for God, not us. Convenience vs. sacrifice. Logistics vs. routine.
- Pastoral care, especially around losses: Grief. Family. Division. Addiction. Unrealized dreams. Financial woes. Abortion. Marriage and divorce.
- Relationships. Reconciliation.
- Fear and regret

Notes on Epiphany: *Epiphany* is a word derived from the Greek for “manifestation” and is usually used as a reminder that Jesus is God’s revelation for the whole world. But

we also use “epiphany” to describe those moments of deeper understanding and insight – like an “a-ha!” moment.

Series synopsis: Sometimes specific moments and places are important in our faith journey. Whether it’s a literal mountaintop or a figurative mountaintop, the spiritual “highs” where we experience God’s grace are formative. These deep spiritual encounters can offer us a new perspective, a new view we’ve never seen before, a reward at the end of a journey (or the beginning of a new one), and more. They are examples of “thin places” where the boundary between heaven and earth is blurry, and we are forever changed.

“Thin places” comes from a **Celtic tradition called *caol ait kweel awtch***. This idea can simply be looked at as mountain tops or other physical places that the air is thin or hard to come by. Thin places really reflect a spiritual thinness as well. It can also be a place where this world and the next one moved closer together, and it was as if you could go from one to the other with one small step.

Resources:

- <https://instituteforbiblereading.org/story-of-the-bible-told-by-mountains/>
- Invite responses to a Facebook post about mountaintop moments or “thin places”
- <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/thin-places/>
- Psalms for liturgy: [48](#), [95](#), [121](#), [125](#)

Visuals: Additional images are on our [website](#)

- Photos of traditional Biblical mountains in present day
- Photos of mountains
- Photos from an airplane above the clouds

Publicity: “See You on Sunday!” and January Harbor Light

Social Justice Issue for February 2023: TBA

Noisy offering: TBA



February 5, 2023: “Where God Dwells”

David on Mount Zion (includes Mount Moriah, Jerusalem, and the Temple)

5th Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: II Samuel 5: 1-10 (NIRV)

5 All the tribes of Israel came to see David at Hebron. They said, “We are your own flesh and blood.”² In the past, Saul was our king. But you led Israel on their military

campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will be the shepherd over my people Israel. You will become their ruler.'

³ All the elders of Israel came to see King David at Hebron. There the king made a covenant with them in front of the LORD. They anointed David as king over Israel.

⁴ David was 30 years old when he became king. He ruled for 40 years. ⁵ In Hebron he ruled over Judah for seven and a half years. In Jerusalem he ruled over all of Israel and Judah for 33 years.

David Captures Jerusalem

⁶ The king and his men marched to Jerusalem. They went to attack the Jebusites who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, "You won't get in here. Even people who can't see or walk can keep you from coming in." The Jebusites thought, "David can't get in here." ⁷ But David captured the fort of Zion. It became known as the City of David.

⁸ On that day David had said, "Someone might win the battle over the Jebusites. But they will have to crawl through the water tunnel to get into the city. That's the only way they can reach those enemies of mine that you say can't see or walk." That's why people say, "Those who 'can't see or walk' won't enter David's palace."

⁹ David moved into the fort. He called it the City of David. He built up the area around the fort. He filled in the low places. He started at the bottom and worked his way up. ¹⁰ David became more and more powerful. That's because the LORD God who rules over all was with him.

Synopsis: Sometimes feeling God's presence is a struggle. Disappointment, grief, and other losses make us wonder where God is and if we'll ever feel God with us.

Throughout Scripture, Zion is the place where God dwells. It's a specific place, but it's also a promise of God's presence with us no matter what. When we come to the table, we're renewed to open our hearts for God to dwell in us.

Felt need: To seek out places and experiences where we experience God's presence and holiness

Visuals: gathering of people

Hands-on item:

Activity: Holy Communion

Media possibilities:

Music: *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* (UMH 110), *Marching to Zion* (UMH 733), *Come to the Table of Grace*

Children's Time:

Social media:

Background information: "Promised Land – Jerusalem." 3:10.

<https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/56689/promised-land-jerusalem>

Related articles:

Discussion points:

February 12, 2023: “Decisions, Decisions - Now!”

Elijah on Mount Carmel

6th Sunday after the Epiphany, Super Bowl Sunday, Scouting Sunday (?)

Scripture: I Kings 18: 20-39 (MSG)

²⁰ So Ahab summoned everyone in Israel, particularly the prophets, to Mount Carmel.

²¹ Elijah challenged the people: “How long are you going to sit on the fence? If GOD is the real God, follow him; if it’s Baal, follow him. Make up your minds!”

Nobody said a word; nobody made a move.

²²⁻²⁴ Then Elijah said, “I’m the only prophet of GOD left in Israel; and there are 450 prophets of Baal. Let the Baal prophets bring up two oxen; let them pick one, butcher it, and lay it out on an altar on firewood—but don’t ignite it. I’ll take the other ox, cut it up, and lay it on the wood. But neither will I light the fire. Then you pray to your gods and I’ll pray to GOD. The god who answers with fire will prove to be, in fact, God.”

All the people agreed: “A good plan—do it!”

²⁵ Elijah told the Baal prophets, “Choose your ox and prepare it. You go first, you’re the majority. Then pray to your god, but don’t light the fire.”

²⁶ So they took the ox he had given them, prepared it for the altar, then prayed to Baal. They prayed all morning long, “O Baal, answer us!” But nothing happened—not so much as a whisper of breeze. Desperate, they jumped and stomped on the altar they had made.

²⁷⁻²⁸ By noon, Elijah had started making fun of them, taunting, “Call a little louder—he is a god, after all. Maybe he’s off meditating somewhere or other, or maybe he’s gotten involved in a project, or maybe he’s on vacation. You don’t suppose he’s overslept, do you, and needs to be waked up?” They prayed louder and louder, cutting themselves with swords and knives—a ritual common to them—until they were covered with blood.

²⁹ This went on until well past noon. They used every religious trick and strategy they knew to make something happen on the altar, but nothing happened—not so much as a whisper, not a flicker of response.

³⁰⁻³⁵ Then Elijah told the people, “Enough of that—it’s my turn. Gather around.” And they gathered. He then put the altar back together for by now it was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Jacob, the same Jacob to whom GOD had said, “From now on your name is Israel.” He built the stones into the altar in honor of GOD. Then Elijah dug a fairly wide trench around the altar. He laid

firewood on the altar, cut up the ox, put it on the wood, and said, “Fill four buckets with water and drench both the ox and the firewood.” Then he said, “Do it again,” and they did it. Then he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it a third time. The altar was drenched and the trench was filled with water.

³⁶⁻³⁷ When it was time for the sacrifice to be offered, Elijah the prophet came up and prayed, “O GOD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make it known right now that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I’m doing what I’m doing under your orders. Answer me, GOD; O answer me and reveal to this people that you are GOD, the true God, and that you are giving these people another chance at repentance.”

³⁸ Immediately the fire of GOD fell and burned up the offering, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and even the water in the trench.

³⁹ All the people saw it happen and fell on their faces in awed worship, exclaiming, “GOD is the true God! GOD is the true God!”

Synopsis: Elijah has a lot of teach us about following God faithfully and being confident in God’s power because of his relationship with God. How do we keep choosing to follow God - maintaining spiritual stamina - no matter the decisions before us?

Felt need: To renew our commitment to follow God with boldness and confidence

Visuals: fire

Hands-on item:

Activity: Souper Bowl of Caring

Media possibilities:

Music: *Days of Elijah* (<https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/worship-tracks/112835/days-of-elijah> or <https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/worship-tracks/54122/days-of-elijah> \$15.00, web license: yes), *Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above* (UMH 126), *Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)*, *God of Grace and God of Glory* (UMH 577), *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus* (FWS 2129)

Children’s Time: “Steelhouse Bible Shorts: Elijah.” Length: 0:30. Cost: Free. A humorous animated illustration of Elijah and the Prophets of Baal.

<https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/7552/steelehouse-bible-shorts-elijah>

Social media:

Background information: “Promised Land – Mt. Carmel.” 3:17.

<https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/56877/promised-land-mt-carmel>

Related articles: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3942331/jewish/The-Story-of-Elijah-and-the-Prophets-of-Baal-on-Mount-Carmel.htm

Discussion points:

February 19, 2023: “In the Glory of the Lord”

Jesus and disciples on Mount Tabor (or Mount Hermon)

Transfiguration Sunday

NOTE: This will be a day of people sharing mountaintop experiences. Pastor Mary will be on vacation.

Scripture: Matthew 17: 1-9 (CEV)

¹ Six days later Jesus took Peter and the brothers James and John with him. They went up on a very high mountain where they could be alone. ² There in front of the disciples, Jesus was completely changed. His face was shining like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

³ All at once Moses and Elijah were there talking with Jesus. ⁴ So Peter said to him, "Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

⁵ While Peter was still speaking, the shadow of a bright cloud passed over them. From the cloud a voice said, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him. Listen to what he says!" ⁶ When the disciples heard the voice, they were so afraid they fell flat on the ground. ⁷ But Jesus came over and touched them. He said, "Get up and don't be afraid!" ⁸ When they opened their eyes, they saw only Jesus.

⁹ On their way down from the mountain, Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Son of Man had been raised from death.

Synopsis: We need mountaintop experiences to encourage us on our faith journey.

When we witness the glory of God in Jesus, it's an opportunity to be strengthened ourselves – and to strengthen others. All of us can offer our faith to others, and all of us "borrow" from the faith of others.

Felt need: To be encouraged by the stories of mountaintop experiences from others – and to think about the moments when God's presence has been especially real for us

Visuals: bright light

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities:

Music: *Holy Ground* (FWS 2272), *Open the Eyes of My Heart, We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding* (FWS 2103)

Children's Time: "Mountaintop Experiences" from Sermons 4 Kids. Object lesson using a flashlight. <https://sermons4kids.com/mountaintop-experiences.html>

Social media:

Related articles:

Discussion points: