**Worship Brainstorming Summary**

**“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)

**Members present:** Pastor Mary, Larry Jorgenson, Jean Kelly, diane Thompson, Betty Kinney, Dave Booth, Lynne Richmond, Jim Post, Karen Post, Rose Emmons, 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:** 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither 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](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm48&version=NIV), [95](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+95&version=NIV), [121](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+121&version=NIV), [125](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+125&version=NIV)

**Visuals:** Additional images are on our [website](https://lakeharborumc.org/2023/01/january-17-2023-worship-brainstorming-mountaintop-stories/)

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

**Sanctuary:** Use the three orange and purple mountain panels from last year’s “Selah” series. Do we want to leave up any trees? Is there a way to use tulle to remind us of the “thin places”?

**Hands-on item:** photo card of one of the Psalm or a question/statement. Example: Look for the thin place today.

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

**Social Justice Issue for Feb.2023:** TBA

**Noisy offering:** TBA

**General discussion points:**

* Mountaintop experiences can be literal or figurative. We are especially interested in the gimes when God’s presence has been powerful. Like God moments, mountaintop experiences sustain us on the journey.
* Transfiguration Sunday (a high) is celebrated just days befor the beginning of Lent where we are thrust into the regular throes of life (often full of lows – or at least a roller coater ride).
* Examples:
  + This past Sunday: acouple from Cedar Springs stopped by during coffee time. Pastor Mary presided at the funeral of their then 16-year-old son, Wyatt, who died in a car accident. The accident rocked their small community. His parents taught her a good deal about navigating grief and the importance of doing so within a community of people.
  + Pastor Mary: confirmation, camp, ordination, the first time she witnessed death while serving as a pastor (and being present with the family), when her kids were born and baptized.
  + Lynne: Watching Wilma die.
  + Jean Wasserman: An experience in Ireland)
  + In the news: Damar Hamlin’s on-air cariac arrest was something of a spiritual awakening for many people. Even an ESPN reporter stopped in the middle of the show to pray for the player. Were it not for the team’s medical staff, Damar would have died. We know the inherent risks in everyday living, but it isn’t often that the tragedies are so public. On a related note:
    - The power of prayer
    - The importance of people who know what to do and act quickly. Jean noted that Sunday’s pregame show introduced the medical staff.
    - Social capital: We hope this experience raises awareness of a variety of issues and that this traumatic experience is used for good.

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**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. 2In 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.’ ”

3All 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.

4David was 30 years old when he became king. He ruled for 40 years. 5In 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**

6The 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.” 7But David captured the fort of Zion. It became known as the City of David.

8On 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.”

9David 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. 10David 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:**

* Mount Moriah is thought to be the mountain where God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.
* The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God’s dwelling place. Later people looked to the mountains (Zion) instead. Zion refers a physical place and a space within each of us. Note how many places are named after theses biblical mountains: Zion National Park, Mount Carmel (cities in TN, IL, etc.).
* Holy Land travel: Bishop Bard, Glenys and David Nellist, and others are hosting a trip to Israel in November. Pastor Mary is going with her mother-in-law.
* People are still fighting over Mount Zion today.
* We associate mountains with God’s dwelling place because:
  + Of their proximity to heaven (Psalms: *I lift my eyes unto the hills. Where does my help come from?...)*
  + Majesty. Jean’s examples: Banff & Lake Lousie in Calgary
  + Peacefulness – not so many people.
  + Kids point up when asked where God is
  + We look up for hope and help; we stumble when we look down.
  + We can see who is approaching from a high point (forts are built there)
* Some of us seek water (and the beach) to meet God.
  + Jean especially likes being at the end of a pier. Even when it is noisy, there is peace.
  + Luke, the Booth’s grandson, used to call Lake Michigan, “the big water.”
  + Water is the most important element of life.
* Mountains are not a convenient place to live --- poor accessibility, rough terrain, very changeable weather
* Being stuck in difficult places – we need a different view:
  + Larry always bow hunted. When he first started, hunters had to dig pits, then wait for deer. He couldn’t see a thing. He was overjoyed when tree stands were allowed. The same would have been true for soldiers in trenches.
  + “Balcony views” is a current church buzzword meaning we need to see the big picture before we can know what to do. It is the opposite of “being in the trenches.”
* Lifechanging experiences:
  + When Larry and Bonnie were in their 50’s, they took a trip to the Adirondacks with Re. John Hice. Everyone hiked Mt. Hadley. They later hiked Noonmark, sitting on a ledge half way up. They were engulfed by fog at the top. It was only when they were down and driving away that they could see the peak.
  + Diane’s trip to Mt. Ranier in a motor home. Her daughter Jenn’s trip to Mt. Klamanjaro.
  + Jean’s trip to Glacier National Park – being just above the clouds – and a little creeped out about the runaway truck lanes.
  + Ivan – being born in Montengro. He still loves the window seat when flying.
  + Dave and Karen in Peru, taking a bus up a very steep and winding road from Aguas Calientes to Macchu Pichu, then walking out the path. The ruins appeared almost out of nowhere. The next day they saw the view of that road from below the mountain – amazing scary to think the busses went up and down the mountain and over a teeny, unsupported bridge every day.
  + Roger Richmond did test driving in the mountains for work. His advice: Never use the passing lane.

**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) **Note:** We may want to use The Voice translation or a recording.

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

21Elijah 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.

22-24Then 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!”

25Elijah 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.”

26So 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.

27-28By 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.

29This 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.

30-35Then 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.

36-37When 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.”

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

39All 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 to 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. **Comments:** Use it. <https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/7552/steelehouse-bible-shorts-elijah>

**Social media:**

**Background information:**

* “1 & 2 Kings.” 8:51. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/kings/>
* “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:**

* Elijah spent a lot of time alone, surviving and epic battle on Mr. Carmel. How did he do it? He choose faithfulness and was confident in God’s power, giving him spiritual stamina for times when things were rough. He was the last prophet to make an appearance as Jesus’ transfiguration.
* Ahab wanted it both ways, i.e. to worship both God and Baal.
* Jezebel is often misunderstood. She was not a two-timer or floozy. She was powerful. The problem was that she worshipped other gods.
* Figurative mountaintop experiences – some are visions/dreams. They show our desire for comfort and hope. Others seem to be odd coincidences.
  + Lynne was on the second floor of a not so nice motel room when she was awakened by a bright light. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and knew that God was there expecting that she would keep her promise. She had been better at making promises to God than keeping them. That changed that night.
  + Just last week, someone talked to Pastor Mary about a vision in which God said he wasn’t finished with this person yet.
  + While in GriefShare, Danielle (Cedar Springs), said she just wanted to see her son in a dream to know that he was alright.
  + Lynne recognized her dead mother’s distinctive footsteps in both her Fenton house and in Luxemborg. Even her dog, Liddy, must have heard them as she went upstairs.
  + Seeing cardinals inspired hope in Pastor Mary’s sister.
  + Betty kept a journal after Gary’s death of the “weird good” experiences.
    - Ex. 1: He had been in Ann Arbor for six weeks before coming home to die. While there, he wanted to buy Betty something for their anniversary (a fur coat). They celebrated with a cake. She said it wasn’t necessary. What she really wanted was a white gold earring to replace one she lost. He died before he could do anything about it. Once day when she was taking out the garbage, she caught a glimpse of something shiny at her feet. It was her lost earring.
    - Ex. 2: All three of their kids arrived at the same time and stayed for Gary’s last week. After the funeral, Scott said he had gotten some deck stain since his dad would have wanted that done. So Betty and the three kids found old clothes and went to work. After a bit, they decided they needed some music. Scott found an old radio, turned it on, and the four of them heard, “It’s a Wonderful World” play from the very beginning – the same song they choose for his funeral. They said, “dad is with us.”
  + Karen Post had her mother’s strawberry pie recipe that she always made for Thanksgiving and Christmas. After Thanksgiving, she was making lots of ceramic projects in the kitchen. The recipe card must have been lost in the mess as she couldn’t find it at Christmas. Jim said if it were that important, she should have written it down in more than one place. About two years had passed and she still hadn’t found the card. It was Mother’s day. Karen took the steps down to the laundry room to get a serving tray, and there was a recipe card upside-down on one of the steps, and yes, it was the one that had gone missing.
  + Rose’s parents were all about family. They died within 12 months of each other. Rose hosted Thanksgiving the first year they were gone. It had been a lovely day with family, especially the grandkids. One of the musical toys in the dining room toy box, started playing all on its own. It never happened before then or since, but her family took it as a sign of her parents saying, “yes, it was a nice Thanksgiving.”
  + As Dave was cleaning out file cabinets in the den, he mentioned that it would be nice to find bulbs for his otoscope. There were some in a tray of odd stuff.
  + Just before Jean was to take her mom home from assisted living, she dreamed that her dad wanted to take Jean’s mom to the hospital. So he took off with her. He came back and said he couldn’t do it because he didn’t have the right medical insurance cards. It was up to Jean to take care of her.
  + Jean had had a childhood memory of her sister and self with her dad when they were much younger. It wasn’t until later that she realized the memory happened about the time he died.
  + This fall, Karen Post caught a couple glimpses of herself that so reminded her of her cousin, Gib. Jim and Karen had meant to spend more time with Gib, but there were several different things happening that got in the way. Jim ended up finding Gib after he had died. To make a long story short, those visions weren’t comforting then and are not now either.
  + Larry wonders how parenting styles affect attachment. He remembers his dad being a practical, no nonsense guy; Rose thinks stern is a better word. Larry has a new perspective on his own parenting and memories now that one daughter is back home.
* Why are these figurative mountaintop experiences so memborable? Comfort. Connection to a loved one. Peace. Glimpse of God’s unconditional love.
* Why do some dreams stick when so many are almost instantly forgettable?
* Spritual journeys: Hearing people’s faith journeys bring hope. God shows up in many ways. It helps takes away our fear of dying. If we are honest, most of our spiritual journeys resemble roller coasters more than mountaintops.
* Grief is hard.
  + There is wisdom in writing stuff down. When talking to people with recent losses, Betty said it help to be open about some of your own weird stuff so they can find comfort. It is also comforting to talk about memories of loved ones who have passed.
  + Now that Jean has been with someone as she passed, she doesn’t fear dying. It is a natural part of life. She treasures the feeling of being present in that moment.
* On a weirder note: Betty’s aunt, Jo, “talked” to the spirit world. Somehow animal horns were part of that process. Some relative said that Betty’s mom must have had that same ability as she was “born with a mask.” Rose’s translation: She had some birth membrance on her face – not common, but not a big deal.
* Related question: Why do people believe in mediums, seanses, ouji boards, psychics, numerology, tarot cards, astrology, etc.? They want answers, hope, and comfort because we are all scared to death of death. We try to avoid death. We try to avoid talking about death. We fear leaving our family behind. We want to stay in control. Inspite of living in a time of the best medical care ever, too often too much is done to avoid dying. On a brighter note, hospice is wonderful. They know exactly what to do; calling doctors is not one of them.

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**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. **Focus:**  Describe the times when you have felt closest to God. They need not be actual mountaintop stories.

**Scripture:** Matthew 17: 1-9 (CEV)

**17** 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. 2There in front of the disciples, Jesus was completely changed. His face was shining like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

3All at once Moses and Elijah were there talking with Jesus. 4So 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!” 6When the disciples heard the voice, they were so afraid they fell flat on the ground. 7But Jesus came over and touched them. He said, “Get up and don't be afraid!” 8When they opened their eyes, they saw only Jesus.

9On 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:**

* The disciples needed the mountaintop experience to prepare them for and sustain them through the challenges that awaited them in Jerusalem.
* We can borrow strength from others which is one reason we need a community of faith.

**Speakers:** While it would be nice to have people speak in real time, we can record their testimony and play it back during worship. These people may want to share.

* Larry Jorgenson (confirmed): He had been a lukewarm Christian until one Maundy Thursday. As he sat up in the choir loft looking at the black surrounding the cross, he was moved to tears. He made a decision to turn his life around.
* Jean Wasserman (she already volunteered, but it should be confirmed): Mountaintop experience, probably in Ireland. She may find it easier to have her testimony prerecorded.
* Sue Graves: The journey of her illness and recovery. She will still be in Arizona. Her family can record her.
* Vicki Zuker: She has many stories about the challenges of having cancer, being treated for it, and what has happened on the way. She shared one story of a picture at the cancer treatment center as a God moment, but it is worth repeating.
* Ron Zuker: As Vicki’s partner, he has stories to tell.