

# Lessons from Sherpas and Wolves

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish  
Season of Creation 4: Mountain  
Isaiah 65:17-25  
Romans 8:29-39  
September 29-30, 2018

*Grace and Peace to you from God, our Creator. Who continually creates. And whose vision of transformation and restoration includes all within creation. Amen.*

## **Move 1: Mountain Focus**

This weekend is our last week of our series on Season of Creation. All month we have approached Christian discipleship from the particular lens of creation. We've reclaimed that caring for creation isn't just the work of a few who happen to be invested and interested. Earth care isn't an add-on or hobby or something we do when we aren't busy. Being a steward of God's earth is a call of all Christians to participate in.

On this final weekend, our focus is on "Mountain." Since the beginning of human existence, there is something about mountains. They stand alone. They are set apart from other marvels in the world. For centuries mountains have been viewed as sacred. Mountains were thought to be the home of God and as one scholar puts it, "the umbilical cord that joined heavens and the earth." [1]

In ancient mythology, we think of Mt. Olympus, home of Zeus and all the Greek gods.

In Hebrew Scriptures, Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion come to mind. Moses received the Ten Commandments on top of Mt. Sinai. The prophets often refer to Mt. Zion when talking about new heaven and new earth.

In the New Testament, mountains are often in the backdrop of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is tempted on the mountain, gives his first sermon on a mountain, feeds people on a mountain. A mountain is where he is transfigured in front of Peter, James, and John. And a mountain is where he commissions the disciples.

In Scripture, lots of big moments happen in the context of mountains. It's where God imparts wisdom, human beings draw nearer to God, and blessings are brought down.

It's still true today. Mountains still shout of creation's beauty, awe, and wonder. They still reveal God's goodness and point to the expansive vision God has for creation.

## **Move 2: Everest and Sherpas**

When I think of mountains today, I cannot help but think of Mt. Everest, the tallest mountain on Earth. Located in Nepal in central Asia, Everest's summit is 29,029 feet above sea level.

Hundreds of people have tried climbing it. Few actually make it all the way to the top. 290 have died trying the climb.

The first successful climb of Mt. Everest happened in 1953. Two men, Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, did the impossible. They made the ascent.

Since that time, climbers have traveled from all over to make the brutal and burdensome climb. Because it's so dangerous, experienced climbers realize they can't do it alone. And almost all climbers rely on Sherpas.

Do you know about Sherpas?

Many think they are mountain guides. But, actually, "Sherpa" isn't a job title. Sherpa actually refers to an ethnic people who live in the mountains of Nepal. The Sherpa people have been living for so long in the mountains that they have genetically adapted to high altitudes.

Sherpas are incredibly comfortable and connected to mountains. Because of this, they are incredibly skilled and experienced climbers. And they have taken that gift and shared it with the world so that all those with dreams of climbing Everest can try.

Sherpas are the backbone of every Everest expedition. They carry the oxygen and gear, and plan the trek. They do the work so climbers can just focus on the "small" task of breathing and not falling.

What a risky and dangerous job. This is what they do for a living: put their lives on the line for complete strangers. And, yet, they do it. To help people connect more deeply with creation and experience one of the greatest climbing feats on Earth.

We all have mountains in our lives, metaphorically speaking. And that's the thing about mountains. When we are at the top, life is good and God is great. We have perspective and can see God's blessings.

But what about those of us who are smack dab in the middle of the ascent up the mountain? The climb is difficult work. It's exhausting. Do we have Sherpas helping us carry the burden? Helping us navigate the journey? My prayer is we all have Sherpas, and that we are Sherpas for other people. For everyone has a mountain and needs help with that climb.

What about when we are at the bottom of the mountain, staring straight up the steepness? Thinking and feeling that it's impossible to do this. Do we have Sherpas who motivate us? Who help us see that we can do this and that we don't have to do it alone? That we have a God who will move mountains for each and every one of us?

Our God doesn't wait for us to come up to him but always will come down to us. God will join us on whatever wilderness we are in, on whatever path we take, whatever adventure we seek.

Our Scripture for today points to this promise and truth.

### **Move 3: God's Holy Mountain**

We start with the prophet Isaiah, who is speaking and preaching to a people just returning to Jerusalem after years of exile. Up until this point, the prophet has been focused on pleading with the people to confess their transgressions and repent of their ways. To take shape with God at their center.

But in Isaiah chapter 65, the prophet pivots. He's not focused on judgment. Here he presents a promising vision forward. A vision of peace, justice, and restoration.

Isaiah invites the people then—and us, God's people, now—to imagine God's holy mountain. On it, former things of violence, death, greed, threat, and exile are forgotten and new possibilities are coming.

God will do this. But not in the "Rapture" way that many read in apocalyptic literature. Not in a negative or exclusive way where some make it and others don't.

God is not going to annihilate the old world and birth a whole new world. No. In Isaiah, the prophet reveals that God will transform the old and make it anew.

The restoration and redemption on God's holy mountain doesn't entail destruction. It entails peace. A return to blessing. A return to deep connection with all in creation.

God wasn't just concerned with the people of Israel returning and rebuilding Jerusalem. This vision of restoration that God lays out entails the entirety of creation. One in which all creatures, big and small, experience justice and peace.

Jesus reveals this vision to us as well. In Mark, we hear anew the promise for the whole creation. Jesus commissions us to proclaim the good news to all.

God's vision in the Old Testament was that all experience God's embrace, presence, and love. The same holds true in Jesus' time. And still today.

No mountain. No height or depth. Not death. Not suffering. Nothing in this earth can ever separate us from the love of God. [Romans 8:38-39]

Isaiah shared that vision with the people. Jesus shared it with the disciples. We now get to participate in that vision and share it with the people of today. To share the vision of all peoples coming together in peace for restoration. To proclaim that Christ is the "new temple on Mt. Zion" who doesn't just stand on the holy mountain but comes down to the groaning. Who enters into our messes. And who asks us, as Sherpas, to bring all nations to him.

Our world is still full of violence. We still delegitimize and silence victims. We still have too much death. People still die way too young. Too many people are still being killed and hurt by war. We still have a society that believes some lives matter more than others. Greed still persists. Famine still occurs.

And, yet, we don't lose hope. We hold onto the promise that God, our Creator, never stops creating. God continually creates anew and will one day create newness out of this world.

I believe this. Evil, violence, and suffering may have a say, but I promise you this: They won't get the final say. God is at work bringing an end to all that old stuff.

I know because God did it to me. My old self was angry. Lost. Bitter. Self-absorbed. A hot-head who thought he had all the answers. Didn't need anyone. Especially God.

Yet God continued to come after me. Through Sherpas. Mentors. Friends. And in doing so, transformed my heart. I was made anew. With God at my center. And grace as my lifeblood. Saved and set free.

God will do the same with the rest of creation. And I see it as our work together as Sherpas: to help others when that mountain seems too steep. Or that middle

trek is too exhausting. We join with God in helping people see anew. To see that they, like all of creation, are meant to experience love, peace, and justice.

#### **Move 4: Wolf Pack**

To close, I want to return to imagery in Isaiah 65. The vision God wants for all of creation, for us. I think is summed up best in the image of the wolf and lamb feeding together. No longer fighting. The lamb no longer afraid of the wolf. The wolf no longer just viewing the lamb as food. They exist harmoniously. Together.

That's what God wants of us. Kinship. Mutuality. A creation that looks out for one another. Cares deeply for the other's well-being despite differences.

I want to show an image of what I believe Christian kinship looks like.

*[image on screen]*



This is a pack of wolves. Wolves travel together whenever they go. Upon first glance, nothing really stands out. Until you dig a little deeper.

The 3 in front, circled in red, are the old and sick. They walk in front to set the pace.

The next 5, circled in yellow, are the strongest. They protect the front from any attack.

The last 5, circled in green, are the next strongest. They protect the back side.

The wolves in the middle are completely protected.

And the last wolf is the leader. This wolf ensures that no one is left behind and keeps the pack moving on the right path.

This is a picture of community looking after and caring for everyone's well-being. This is what we are called to do.

To walk alongside people wherever they find themselves on the mountain.

To help ease their burdens.

To point them to our God who always comes down the mountain.

To remind people that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Amen.

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Resources:

[1] Santmire, Paul H. "Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary," p. 164-177.

[2] *Seasons of the Spirit: Mountain Sunday*. September 23, 2018.

[3] *Seasons of the Spirit: Mountain Sunday*.

[4] Santmire, Paul H. "Season of Creation"

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### *REFLECTION QUESTIONS*

- *When and where have you had a "mountaintop" experience?*
- *What place in your daily life is sacred and allows you to connect deeper with God?*
- *Who are people that have helped you climb the steep mountains in your life?*