

to the Mountain Top

Matthew 24:37 ~ 44

+

DECEMBER 1, 2019

" Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths."

One day before he was assassinated, on April 3, 1968, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in Memphis, Tennessee. He said:

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live – a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, we'll get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

The First Reading today is from Isaiah 2, and it's a vision of a beautiful mountain. The prophet Isaiah is called by God to pronounce God's coming judgment on the people of Jerusalem and Judah. But Isaiah is also given a beautiful view from the top of God's holy mountain, a vision of hope, of God's plan to restore God's chosen people someday, to

bring peace and justice to the nations through God's anointed one, the Messiah.

In 1948, a World War II veteran named Earl Shaffer was the first person to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. This 2,160-mile hiking trail connects Springer Mountain, Georgia, with Mount Katahdin, Maine. It is billed as the longest hiking-only footpath in the world.

Shaffer was restless after the war and he was grieving the death of his best friend. He needed to find some peace, so he set out alone on this challenging adventure. It took him through forests and streams and over mountains. He reached Maine in about four months. His journey has inspired thousands of hikers since to try to hike the entire trail, too. Every year, about 1,500 people begin the journey; only 1 in 10 completes it.

Since 1948, Shaffer has hiked the entire trail two more times. He began his third hike of the trail at the age of seventy-nine. Why would a 79-year-old man want to hike alone through 2,000 miles of rugged forests and mountains? He says he finds inspiration in the view at the end of the journey, the view from the top of Mount Katahdin.

"Katahdin is the most beautiful," Shaffer says. "From the top you can see everything. You can look at it from so many different ways, and it looks different every time . . . People ask me what it is to make me go off and do something like this. It's the beauty,"

Every day of our lives, God is the mountain top, watching over us, protecting us, seeing the big picture of the landscape of our days with gentle eyes and forever inviting us to come to the mountain top.

The Advent season is our chance to remember, to celebrate, to announce to the world that the Messiah has come and that we have been called to walk in the light of God. And as we walk in God's light, we will choose justice and peace - because through Jesus we have been restored to God and restored to one another. For these next four weeks leading up to Christmas, I hope that we will focus on how we can heal any separation between each one of us and God and between ourselves, that we may share more of Jesus' light and life with a world that needs so badly to know God's hope and God's peace.