



Up On The Mountain, Down In The Valley  
Sermon by Bishop Yehiel Curry  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Charles  
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I bring you greetings on behalf of the Metro-Chicago Synod, 180 to 185 congregations and new starts. I bring you greetings from Cook County, Kane County, DuPage County, and Lake County. Finally, I bring you greetings on behalf of the 88,000 baptized Lutherans in our territory who call you brother and sister. I am Bishop Yehiel Curry. It is an honor and privilege to be here to celebrate with my former classmate, Sarah, her family, and this wonderful congregation. A couple weeks ago I was part of a bishop delegation who traveled to the Lutheran church in Jordan and the Holy Land. We were there for six days, and we did a lot of work. We took in some of the holy sites, but we were there to put our eyes on the Lutheran hospital and to go to some of the Lutheran schools and congregations, to meet with the Palestinian authority and the Israeli government. Our last two days we journeyed to Jordan. Apparently, a couple years ago they did an archaeological dig. And they discovered this baptismal area that they called the baptismal place of Jesus Christ. The Lutheran Church has built a structure there on the site, and we were there to forgive the mortgage. Amen [laughter]. So our delegation crossed the border into Jordan, and we got on a bus and off a bus. And every time it looked like we were going up this mountain to where the church was, there was a detour and we got off the bus and back on the bus and then we got to a checkpoint. And then we thought, well, a couple people couldn't go with us, so then we left just to find out that we had to return and grab them. And then we got, finally, up to the peak where this wonderful church is built that we helped to create and fund. And you could

oversee dry land. And you could oversee the wilderness. And we could look down at the archaeological dig at the Jordan. You could see Jericho and Bethlehem. I stood at this peak after such a unique journey, and I glared off into the distance. And just for a moment, I forgot about the tension between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Just for a moment, I forgot about some of the divisions that are happening here in America. For a moment, everything made sense. For a moment, I got a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. And just like that [snapped fingers], I was on the plane descending back to O'Hare. My phone goes off, there's a thousand messages, and I looked to my wife and I said, "Welcome to the valley" [laughter]. There is a mountain that bridges our Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany cycle with the season of Lent and Easter. And that bridge or that mountain is called transfiguration. Jesus takes some disciples with him up a mountain where he is revealed as God's beloved Son, echoing the words God spoke at Christ's very own baptism. When we look at Luke's account of this text, we get insight as to why Jesus took them up the mountain. Luke says that it was to pray. If you combine those two narratives, while Jesus was praying, the disciples fell asleep. They woke up and noticed Jesus was there with Moses and Elijah. Have you ever had a dream, and you woke up and you tried to go back to sleep so the dream could continue? Have you ever picked up the phone and called someone because the dream was so real and just wanted to make sure that they were all right? The disciples are having this moment. They're having a spiritual moment on the mountaintop, and Peter is trying to make sure that it's real. He's trying to keep the dream there. So he speaks and he says, should we be seeing this, Jesus? Is it all right for us to be here? And just like that, Moses and Elijah are gone. The Bible says that Jesus was transfigured. His face changed and his clothes changed. Seminary teaches you to question the text and argue the text. It teaches you to dig a little bit deeper. And so my wondering in the text, because when Jesus touches them, they only see Jesus. My wondering is, did Jesus change on the mountain or is it the disciples who changed? Did Jesus always have that glow? Did his



clothes always shine? Were the disciples changed by the process of going up the mountain? Being in such a spiritual environment in the midst of prayer, do they now see Jesus for who he's been since the time he's called them? I like to think that they don't change, we do. Christ doesn't change, we do. We see Christ differently. This congregation, from 2017, has been going through a journey up a mountain similar to my experience in the Holy Land [laughter]. Every time you think you're headed up, there's a detour. And some people get off the bus, and some people go on. And then you're surely going up, and then you get word that there's somebody who you left back down there who now wants to go up. And so now you've got to go back down and get the person from the checkpoint and bring that person -- I'm talking about Sarah, in case you ain't figured it out [laughter] -- and then you've got to get that person. Mountaintop experiences transform us all. The unique thing about this moment is Sarah did not go by herself. You all went along with her. Bethlehem, I want you to know that transformation happens on the mountain, but ministry happens in the valley. Thank you [laughter]. Welcome to the mountain; welcome to the valley. God has given us a new vision. God has changed us all in the process so that we can see each other differently. God has changed some of our titles, some of our perspectives, but I need you to know that every time the Word goes forth, something inside us changes, and we see Christ differently. Every time flawed people grasp hands and go to the throne of grace and offer up a word of prayer, Christ's words seep in, we are transformed, and we see one another differently. God's grace is sufficient and has been ever present with you and this process. Christ has changed me. Amen.