

Let us pray:

*God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end, and at my departing. Amen.*

You do know this about me by now, but, I am a mountain person. The sight of mountains stirs my soul, my heart swells. While I love to be up in them looking down at the views, I am most stirred when I am in the valley looking up at them. Mountains are to me, a significant image of God: solid, vast, grounded, unshakeable.

At the Caritas service last Monday, I told them the story about St Brendan the Navigator who set out to discover the land of heaven. As he left the shores of Ireland in his coracle, he prayed: *'Oh my God help me, for my boat is so small and thy sea is so great.'*

I feel that when I look up at a mountain, especially those of the Alpine country. *I am so small, and you, O God, are so great!* And in that thought, I feel safe.

God is my rock. God, firm and impregnable. God, in whom I can and willingly lose myself. God, in whom are many mysteries.

Approaching a mountain and starting the ascent, whether by road or on foot, has the feeling of pilgrimage. Like the pilgrims in ancient times who approached and ascended the hill to the temple in Jerusalem with excited anticipation, and a lightening of their hearts.

Many Bible stories have a setting on a mountain. There it is a place away from distraction, a place where one may become more attuned to the voice of God.

It was on mountain heights that many spiritual insights were experienced by prophets and apostles, religious leaders and saints: for example: Moses on Mount Sinai receiving the 10 commandments; and on Mount Nebo where he was shown the land of promise stretched out before him.

In the gospels Jesus is often found on mountains, like during: his temptation, his sermon on the mount, feeding a multitude, being transfigured, and, giving the great commission to his disciples.

I remember when Sav and I were on [Mount Ruapehu](#), the largest active volcanic mountain in New Zealand, we were descending from near the top on this chairlift, and I said to Sav, *can you hear the silence?*

A strange thing to say, I know, but it was *intense*. And that is what comes across to me in many of these Biblical stories, the intense nature of meeting God.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Isaiah declares:

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

The image has the Lord's house as being quite visible, like a beacon to which we are drawn. I wonder too, as the ancient Hebrews were terrified of the sea, if the hills offered a safe place? A city on a hill is likely to be well fortified. Mountains may offer an escape from the chaos and warfare below.

Today's reading from Isaiah offers more than an escape, rather, a vision of transformation. Just as the wolf no longer feeds on the lamb, and the lion eats straw rather than flesh, so too will the violence and injustice among humans end. This text is one of several in the Bible where God's healing and restoring to wholeness encompasses the whole scope of creation.

A similar choice of words in Mark's gospel provides an alternative to the great commission of Matthew. While Matthew's Jesus tells the disciples to *Go and make disciples of all the nations*, Mark's Jesus tells them to *Go ... and proclaim the good news to the whole creation*.

The mountain images work in two ways, first, that God's kingdom is held up there for all to see, and secondly, the people are called to come, to make that effort to come and climb that mountain and meet God.

But, of course it is possible to avert our eyes and put off the climb. It's no quick jog down to the letterbox after all. Or a quick google to see if one can find God on the first page of searches!

Like the disciples who left their nets to follow Jesus, one has to travel light to undertake a climb. A lot needs to be left at the foot of the hill. Many desire a mountaintop encounter and experience with God, but cannot find the time or energy.

But like beacons, churches with their spires and bell towers, mountains cause us to lift our eyes, as Psalm 121 says, *I lift my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

So, when I look at a mountain, I am reminded of God and my desire to meet with God, being able to put aside all other distractions. But to do that, I have to make time, space, and an effort. That may take the form of coming to church, or of having a deliberate quiet time, perhaps a walk where I can talk and listen freely to God.

'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

*Let us pray, the same prayer again:*

*God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end, and at my departing. Amen.*



*Mount Ruapehu - 2,797 m (9,177 ft)*