

Strength Like a Mountain – January 22, 2017

Preached by Ministerial Intern D. Scott Cooper at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Many of you, like me, recognize this line from “The Sound of Music”, when the Mother Abbess encourages the Von Trapps to cross the mountains to escape the Nazis. Imagine my shock when I learned she was quoting from the Psalms in the Hebrew Bible!

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Where do you look for help? Where do you go for strength and to have your spirit replenished?

Mountains loom large, physically and figuratively, in our world and in our lives. Characters in the Hebrew Bible often associated being high atop a mountain as being on holy ground and to being nearer Jehovah. Little wonder, few landscapes can rival the awe-inspiring strength and beauty of the mountains. It’s easy to imagine why people feel introspective, closer to nature, perhaps even closer to the divine in the mountains. These immense stone monuments, rising toward the heavens, “speak in silence to the very core of our being.”¹

Where I went to college, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, students could get away by venturing into the Daniel Boone National Forest. We would drive into the woods, park and walk to Lockegee Rock, an outcropping from which we would look down and see nothing but hills, trees, and a sliver of Cave Run Lake off in the distance. At night, we could lie on our backs on the rock and look up to see nothing but multitudes of stars unobstructed by any human-created illumination.

College students are hardly the first to sit atop a mountain for inspiration or wander into the woods to replenish their souls. UU favorite Henry David Thoreau famously spent time outdoors on the shores of Walden. The Buddha went outside, sat under the Bodhi tree and attained enlightenment. The prophet Muhammad would periodically seclude himself in a mountain cave for several nights of prayer; later, he reported being visited by Gabriel in the cave, where he stated he received his first revelation from God.

Since time began, people have returned to nature for meditation, comfort and rejuvenation. Standing atop the mountain, we feel its strength supporting us, and we look out into a never-ending star-filled universe. Standing atop the mountain, we feel its strength supporting us, and we look out beyond the horizon to Beloved Community.

When do you lift up your eyes to look for help? How do you open your heart to beauty and strength?

Often our lives and our world can feel chaotic. What outside of you is a source of strength? Where do you go to have your spirit replenished? What can you count on to be there for you? What is your mountain? Is it real or metaphorical? Is it a person, or a place, or a sense of spirit? I invite you now to reflect in silence on the sources of strength and permanence in our lives.

¹ Ansel Adams