

*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. 9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

Three went with Jesus to the top of the holy mountain - Peter, James, and John. They lived so long ago and so far away that they are only names to us. Peter, James, John.

Were Jesus to go to the top of that mountain this morning, who would he take? You? Me? The President? A reporter? Or would he take the three I met on the front page of the Plain Dealer this week?

First a mother. She left her three young children with her sister while she went to the grocery store. She returned to find the house a smoldering shell, the firemen searching for the bodies of her children among the ashes. I think she needs to be on the top of the mountain with Jesus.

On Thursday, I met officer Prade, an Akron policeman. A disturbance at a bar in the early morning hours, a fight, shots fired. After order had been restored, Officer Prade saw a body lying in the street, a victim of the random shot. He turned over the body to see the face of his son - dead. Officer Prade also needs to go up the mountain with Jesus.

On Friday I met the Haitian woman. Her mother was one of more than a thousand drowned as a ferry boat sank in stormy seas. Her picture was not a statistic, a number but the pain of grief, a daughter suddenly losing the life that has been with her from her first breath in this world. We'll send her along on that mountain climb.

We'll watch those three go up the mountain with Jesus. It's a hard climb, the path is steep. The way is rocky. But Jesus is no stranger here, he knows where to lead. And he knows these three, how long they can go before a rest, when they need to stop and drink.

At last they arrive at the top. Jesus their help and their guide and their friend, is suddenly changed. His face begins to shine like the sun, his clothes radiate light. Beings not

from the world are with him, Moses and Elijah, like in a dream the three know them and recognize them though they've never seen them before.

Suddenly a cloud covers the mountain, they are in a fog, they can no longer see. Yet there is a brightness in the fog, and a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

For a moment all is forgotten, all grief and loss and sorrow. In the hearts of these three who have climbed the mountain with Jesus there is only fear. They fall to the ground.

Then Jesus touches them, his human flesh warm and gentle. His voice assuring he says, "Get up and do not be afraid."

They look up, the cloud is gone, Moses and Elijah are gone, but Jesus remains.

Jesus remains. Three young children are gone, love and laughter, first days of school, and graduations, weddings and grandchildren, their help in her own years of dying, all of these are gone with them.

Working hard for their food and clothes, hours holding them in times of sickness, the washing of clothes, changing of diapers, all were investments of love turned to ashes.

We think if we could improve housing, end poverty, increase fire safety, no more mothers would come home to ashes.

We think if we could ban handguns, or control crime, restrict drugs and alcohol, no more random bullets would tear a father's heart.

We think that if we could just have better warning of storms, better regulations for boats, better training for their captains, bodies would no longer wash on the shores.

But death is still on its way. We might be able to delay its arrival, but at six or at sixty it leaves us shouting, "What's the use?"

Jesus takes us up the mountain today. For a moment we leave behind the burning and the shooting and the drowning. For a moment we leave behind earth itself and see another glory.

There is more than the life that we know.

There is a God who is not bound and limited by our flesh and blood, by death, by time.

There is living beyond the grave, existence beyond dying.

The one with all power and all glory says, "Listen to Jesus."

He'll take you to the top of the mountain.

He will guide you along the narrow path.

Jesus knows you; the way will not be steeper than you can endure.

Even if a cross marks the end of your road, horrible pain of body and spirit, Jesus will not let go of your hand.

One thing matters, only one thing: that Jesus can bring us to life beyond death.

If he cannot then this life is simply senseless and cruel. But if he can raise three young children to play and laughter once more, and give a son back to his father, and a mother back to her daughter, then we will follow where he leads, and listen, continually listen to him.

His hand is reaching to touch you, through you to touch a grieving mother, daughter, father.

“Get up, and do not be afraid,” Jesus says.

And we look and we see Jesus only.