

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Devotional Notes

October 2012

Theme: Following in Christ's Footprints

I'd like you to picture in your mind's eye a mountain or a range of mountains: mountains you have personally seen, or mountains you have seen on TV or postcards or, if you are or were an energetic person, mountains you have climbed. They are majestic aren't they? And, if they are very high, they are snow-capped all the year round and breath-taking to look at. Mountains are places of recreation - for walking, climbing and winter sports - wonderful, exciting, exhilarating, but at the same time dangerous. They create barriers between countries, and great difficulties for people who live or travel there, such as avalanches and lack of oxygen. However, they are also places of inspiration to poets and writers, who wax lyrical over their grandeur and magnificence. Mountains can also be places of spiritual renewal, far away from the regular routines and difficult situations in life. In the Bible they are places where you are nearer to God and can encounter God himself.

Mountains feature a lot in the Bible: Moses received the 10 commandments from God on Mount Sinai; Elijah had a great triumph over the prophet of Baal through God's intervention in the contest on Mount Carmel; then after the prophet ran away from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, he heard God call to him in the silence after the storm on Mount Horeb; the psalmist finds God's help in the everlasting hills en route to Jerusalem; Isaiah sees the Lord's house on a mountain, drawing all people to God; and three of the disciples had a wonderful experience on a high mountain, when Jesus was transfigured before them, Moses and Elijah appeared with him, and then they heard God speaking to them.

The Gospel writer Matthew (in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) describes Jesus going up a mountain away from the crowds and sitting down to teach his close followers about many different issues. There is rather a lot here for anyone to take in at one sitting, so Matthew may have later gathered together various sayings of Jesus and placed them in this setting, or maybe Jesus took the group away for a week up into the hill country around Lake Galilee, where they could have some peace and quiet and feel closer to God as they absorbed his radical new teaching. **Read Matthew 6: 1-16.**

Here Jesus is talking about how we should practise our faith, looking at three issues in his day: prayer, almsgiving and fasting. He makes us think about how and why we carry out the regular routines of our faith in God, both in our personal life, as well as in the life of the church. He asks us to consider whether we actually mean what we say in our prayers. Do we put them into practice, or are they just empty words? He challenges the way we do things. Do we like to make a big show or a big fuss so that everyone knows what we are doing, or can we serve God faithfully whilst merging into the background?

Just like the mountains, the teaching of Jesus was and is both awe-inspiring and challenging, but just as those who live in and climb mountains can overcome difficulties through tremendous strength of character and physical feats, so we too can find strength from our Lord to put his difficult teaching into practice in our daily lives.

Hilary Smith

1. People have to take leading roles within the church, and most churches and local congregations are desperate for members to come forward to do so. How can this be done without 'performing our religious duties in public'?
2. Jesus mentions prayer, charitable giving and fasting. Are these all still relevant today? Are there other current religious practices we might add to this list? What might Jesus say to us today about how and why we should carry these out?