

A View From The Top Week 3: Trust. Act. Keep Going.

1 Kings 18:41-46

We're in week 3 of our A View from the Top series, where we've been looking at mountaintop moments in the Bible. How many of you have ever BEEN on a mountaintop before? Ok, I want you to think about the view that you normally expect. You can see all the landscape, the different houses and roads. Most of the time, when you go up on a mountaintop—you feel like you can see everything.

But what happens when you can't? Because an inability to see what's out there can be part of a mountaintop experience too. The first year we went to the Smoky Mountains, we were so excited to go up to Clingman's Dome. It was a BEAUTIFUL day as we started our drive up to the parking lot where the trailhead was. But we started to notice, as we climbed higher up the mountain...the conditions were changing. Zack has a little temperature indicator on his dashboard and we could see the number going down a degree every couple of minutes. The wind was picking up. And THEN...it started to SNOW.

We had been in T shirts. We were absolutely rookies at this and had NOT come prepared so I think I had a hoodie and a beanie, I don't know WHAT our kids had, but it was not adequate for the situation. And by the time we got to the parking lot to start the hike...it was a cloudy, snowy MESS. You could hardly see.

The wind was PAINFUL. We kind of wandered around the parking lot, more like struggled against the wind, and then we finally gave up. Got back in the car, and watched the snow go away and the temperature rise as we went down the mountain.

So in the context of a car ride and failed hike on our vacation, this was annoying. But what about when this happens in our FAITH? What about when we expect that we're going to have a clear view but then we can't see what's coming next or we don't know what God is up to...what does that do to our faith and the way we live our lives?

Today we're looking at a moment in the prophet Elijah's life where it was hard to see what God would do next. And in some ways, it's kind of ironic that this is happening to Elijah because he was one of those people who had a SOLID history of hearing from God and acting on what he heard. If you don't know a lot about Elijah, he was a prophet during the time of Israel's kings and he was in it with one of the worst kings ever. King Ahab. And to make matters worse, it wasn't just King Ahab that was terrible, but he had an equally terrible wife named Jezebel.

And Ahab and Jezebel, they just wanted to do their thing. They didn't want to listen to God, they didn't want to be corrected, they wanted total control and freedom. And they worshipped this other god named Baal. So there's all this conflict happening between Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel. But somehow, Elijah

always seems to come out on top—in fact, going into this particular story, he’s just had this huge encounter with God’s power, as he brought down fire onto an altar where he had soaked all the wood with water...simply with the mention of God’s name.

~~Elijah is just one of these prophets in the Old Testament. And if you read through the different prophets and their stories, you’ll see this kind of push-pull dynamic between the prophets and the kings. It’s not always as dramatic as some of the stuff that happens with Elijah and Ahab, but it’s there. Because on one hand, the kings don’t love being told they’re wrong and if they don’t change their ways then doom is going to come upon their kingdom. Not a fan of that. BUT, on the other hand, they WANT to be successful, and God keeps popping in with these miraculous moments, so even though they are annoyed by the prophets, they still keep them around because in some way, they seem to know what’s up.~~

So that kind of sets the scene for you as we look at this specific story. And, on top of all of this, it’s happening in the backdrop of a 3 year drought that brought with it a famine. So there’s no food. Hope is literally drying up.

And then we come to the mountaintop.

And when we get to the mountaintop, Elijah and his servant are up there because Elijah has made this proclamation to Ahab—

the drought is ending. There is the sound of rain. But here's the thing, the tension in this moment of hope...is that Elijah seems to be the only one aware of this impending rain. There's not a cloud in the sky. And when Elijah and his servant go up to Mt. Carmel and they look out, they have essentially the opposite experience we had at Clingman's Dome. They can see EVERYTHING because the sky is 100% perfectly clear. NOT what you want to see when you're hoping for rain.

But even though the sky is clear...even though his servant says, "there is nothing," Elijah keeps looking. In fact, he says go back as many as SEVEN TIMES, and just keep looking for what God is doing. God WILL show up.

And just like the servant, sometimes we need to hear that, especially when we're having trouble seeing what is going to come next. We have to **(SLIDE) Keep looking because we can't always see what God is up to at first glance.** If you've ever been in a season where you've been waiting on God, you know the work can be slow. You know it doesn't always feel clear. And when we're in those moments, that lack of clarity can be really defeating. We can start to give up our hope, we start to think that maybe God has forgotten about us. And we can feel that in all kinds of areas of our lives. We can feel that in our work, in our family life, even just with the direction our lives are going as we try and build them into what we want them to be.

As we wait for God to act, the hard reality is that so often, what we SEE...can be a whole lot of nothing.

When I was in high school biology, we had a unit where we incubated chicken eggs. And on one hand, this was kind of a boring unit, because every day you'd go into the lab, and there were still just a crate full of eggs under a heat lamp. They were just...there. Being warm. Being eggs. It was not exciting.

But THEN, one day, the little beaks started pecking through the shells. And everyone just FREAKED OUT. I feel for these poor baby chicks, being born into a world of high pitched screaming high schoolers. Welcome to the chaos, baby chicks. And before you knew it, you had these fuzzy yellow chicks walking around, and you'd totally forgotten about the days of boring eggs.

But as exciting as that was, I very clearly remember our teacher saying, "now, this is how this SHOULD go, but at the end of the day, there's no 100% guarantee that the eggs WILL hatch. There's no way to predict what the little chicks will look like or if they'll be healthy." You just had to trust and wait and keep looking, expecting something to happen.

I think that's the invitation to faith that we find in this Elijah story. Because so often, we DON'T know...we CAN'T know. But we can wait. We can keep looking, we can expect that God is going to be on the move, some way and somehow.

Now there's a lot of risk in trusting God like that. It's not easy and it's often pretty scary. And maybe even scarier than the risk of TRUST that we see in this story; that we feel in our own lives, is the risk of ACTION. Because sometimes when we're trying to understand what God wants us to do, sometimes we have to **(SLIDE) Take action even when it's difficult to see the end result.**

For Elijah, the MINUTE his servant says—cloud spotted! It's tiny. It's not that dark. I don't know what it's going to do, but there is a cloud...the minute he hears this news, he acts. He sends word to this king who hates him most of the time to get in his chariot and go, because rain is coming.

Elijah acts before he knows for sure, because if he waits until he's certain, he's going to be too late. If Ahab doesn't go before the rain starts and the road gets muddy, he's going to be stuck. We just can't always wait to see the end result before we act in faith.

One of the things I get to do is co-teach the Baptism Class for all St. Luke's families along with our Director of Kids' Ministry, Amy Boles. And every time we teach it, she shares this story of a daily ritual she has with her girls **(SLIDE)** She started this when her oldest was about a year and a half old, asking a simple question on the way to daycare: "What should we talk to Jesus about today?"

Now, with a toddler, it started as things like “French fries!” which I am down to talk to God about too. I want to know—curly? Waffle? What does Jesus think about this? But as her girls have started to get older, these conversations have evolved. It's gone from food to “I don't know who I'll play with at recess” or something that's going on in their classrooms. And here's the thing that Amy is doing by asking this question every day—she's creating good communication with her kids...and she's also teaching them to communicate with God. She's laying the foundation for their faith. So that when life gets complicated, and we know it will, they know how to bring those complicated things to a space of prayer.

It's pretty impossible to predict who are kids are going to be or where their faith is going to go into adulthood. But I think what is so beautiful about this practice is that **(SLIDE) Not knowing what tomorrow will bring doesn't negate the importance of the action we take today.** In fact, sometimes I think it's the not knowing that really demonstrates what it means to act in faith.

And sometimes as we take action, as we act with trust and believe that God is doing something even something we can't see, that means we're going to have to tap into our resiliency. I was joking with someone this week that I've never preached on

a passage with the phrase “gird your loins” before, but here we are. V. 46: He girded his loins and ran off to do the work.

Now this phrase has a couple meanings—the most literal is that Elijah lived in a time where they wore kind of flowy robe things and if he was going to run, he had to tuck his robe in so he didn’t get tripped up. But there’s also the more metaphorical meaning which is just—**(SLIDE) prepare for things to be challenging.** Prepare for things to not go as planned; prepare to do the hard work.

Sometimes we talk about waiting on God, looking for God to show up, and maybe our temptation is that we want God to act and we want a nice, neat and tidy ending to it all. But even when God moves, that usually doesn’t mean the work is done. I mean, if you keep reading Elijah’s story, he is about to have the scariest, probably hardest moment of his whole ministry. He’s going to be so threatened, so afraid, that even after all of this...he’s going to go hide for his life in a cave.

We probably don’t instinctively welcome those challenging moments. But I do think there’s something really unique and really valuable about a season of faith where it gets hard, it gets even a little overwhelming and scary, and we make the choice to keep trusting. When we keep going. When we commit to do the work that God has for us.

I can't help but think of what happened at General Conference a couple of weeks ago. **(SLIDE)** As our delegates from all over the world voted to do things like take out language from the Book of Discipline restricting the ordination and marriage and just overall affirmation of LGBTQIA+ people, there was so much to celebrate. You know people have been fighting for inclusion within our Church for decades. Decades of people looking out to the horizon and saying...I don't see anything, but I'm going to keep looking.

And as much as we're celebrating, and I am SO grateful for what happened in Charlotte, I need you to know...the work isn't over. There's still work to be done to heal wounds, to foster true inclusion, to create spaces where the name of Jesus is used to love and uplift, not to hurt or exclude. That work is what we get to continue to do and do in new ways now that this big moment of faith has happened.

And it might not be the easiest work to do. It's going to take listening, it's going to take grace, it's going to take repentance, it's going to mean entering into some brave spaces together. And just like we had to practice trust that God would move in the first place, we have to practice trust as we keep going and we meet whatever challenges show up in this next season.

I guess if I could sum up what we learn from this whole story it would boil down to this: **(SLIDE)**

Trust.

Act.

Keep Going.

And here's the last thing I'll say to you about this whole thing today. If you're listening to this, and you're like, great. Love the concept...really unsure WHAT I'm supposed to be doing, or even really unsure WHAT I'm supposed to be looking for! If that's you—maybe this is your invitation to find the Elijah in your life. Because my guess is that we actually, if we had to put ourselves in any role in this story, most of the time we are so much more like the servant than Elijah. We don't know what God is doing, we don't even know what we should be asking God for or how it might come to us.

So we need those Elijah-type people. Who can look at the sky and see more than just a wisp of a cloud. Who can speak trust into our lives. Who can say the thing that we might be afraid to speak out loud or don't even know how to articulate. Who can encourage us and say even when you see NOTHING...keep looking. Even when you can't know the outcome...keep taking action. Even when it gets so hard...keep going.

Because sometimes our mountaintops, those places where we experience God at work, sometimes our mountaintops look like those kinds of conversations. Sometimes those mountaintops

happen in coffee shops or small groups or on a walk on the Monon. Sometimes our deepest moments of trust...happen with someone standing right next to us.

So when you find yourself in your next mountaintop moment, remember: trust. Act. And keep going.

Let's pray.