Good morning Trinity family, Pastor Karen here with you today and I am excited to finally be with you. I moved into the Elkhart area about a week and a half ago and have spent some time unpacking a few boxes. Those of you who have moved before you know exactly where I have been. Well, I can't say that the house is completely settled yet. But at least it's livable; at least I know where I can find things to get through the everyday life. The rest of it will get unpacked as we go. But one of the things I want to say to you is thank you. I really mean that. Ever since I stepped foot into Elkhart, I've experienced your love and your hospitality in a whole variety of ways. From the moment I walked into the kitchen, there, it was filled with cards and gifts and flowers and all sorts of things. Since I stepped foot into this building, I have been met by wonderful loving people who have just wanted to make me feel welcome. There have been cards in the mail. There's been a wonderful staff that has welcomed me. I can really see the sense of hospitality that is a part of the Trinity family. And I really want to say thank you for that. It's a way of helping me to feel welcome and to feel like this is a good place for me to be at.

Now some of you have probably read my letter that went out and so you already know a few of my bio, but let me just share a couple of things. So moving to Elkhart is almost like moving home for me I grew up in Mishawaka. My mother still lives in Mishawaka. I have a sister who lives in Granger with her family and I have another sister that lives in Illinois with her family. So I can't say that I know everything about this area. But I do know a few things. It's like moving home. Here's something I didn't put in my bio. I gave my life to Jesus Christ when I was in high school. From that moment on, there were some things that were slightly out of focus for me, kind of like the picture that you might be seeing right now a picture that's very, very out of focus. The reason for that was because when I first became a Christian I, I knew that God desired things for me, but I really didn't know what they were. I was slightly confused. I felt like I was going down a path, but I didn't know where the path lead. It took me time to figure out what it was that Jesus Christ desired for me in my life, and in my walk with Him. So, for a long time, things were just out of focus. I didn't have a clear picture of what it is that Jesus wanted. And that takes me to our scripture today, because in our scripture today, Jesus is about to take three of his friends up the mountain, just three of them. They're about to go up the mountain for an incredible mountain top adventure. Now, Peter, James, and John at this time had no idea what they are about to experience. But what they experience will change everything not only for that day, but for their future as well. I want to invite you to hear these words
from the book of Mark, the ninth chapter. It's a scripture that may be familiar to you, but hear the difference that this not only makes in these friends lives, but ask yourself how this might make a difference in yours as well. Let us hear these words:

*Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up to a high mountain to be alone. As they watched Jesus, his appearance was transformed. His clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. Then, Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here. Let's make three shelters as memorials, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”. He said this because he didn't really know what else to say for they were all terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them and a voice from the cloud said “This is my dearly loved son. Listen to him”. Suddenly, when they looked around they saw only Jesus with them. As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept it to themselves. But they often asked one another, what he meant by rising from the dead?*

That's a good question.

So let's work through this scripture a little bit together and try to figure out what it is that God has for us in this day and in this time. When this scripture was first read, the first sentence talked about how six days later, so we have to ask ourselves the question six days later, from what? The answer goes back to a teaching that Jesus gave right at the end of Mark, chapter eight. In that teaching, he gave them a very, very difficult train of thought because he told them that he, Jesus, the one that they loved dearly, would be crucified and would die. That's not a word you ever want to hear about somebody who's important to you and your life. And there is no way that these disciples wanted to hear anything like this coming out of the mouth of Jesus. Peter is the one who speaks up and he says, “Never Jesus, never will that happen”.

And here they are six days later with that teaching fresh in their mind, still pondering, how could that ever happen? Not to Jesus. So, Jesus takes these three disciples, Peter, James, and John, and he takes them up the mountain. Now, we're not exactly sure why he takes these three particular guys up the mountain? There are some scholars who believe that the reason these three are taken is because, well, maybe there's some of Jesus's favorite people. Yet there are other scholars who say, well, maybe these three friends are the ones who clearly get into more trouble and Jesus wants to keep them close, so he can keep an eye on them.

Or maybe, Jesus knows what's going to happen in the future. Let me tell you right now he does. He knows that these three men are going to need a mountaintop experience
that will ground them in faith so that they will be able to get through what is about to happen next.

I like that picture that we have up front. Little by little it’s going to get slightly clear. Maybe little by little, you’re actually going to be able to tell what that picture is. Let's get back to those mountaintop experiences. Anyone who has walked in faith has had those mountaintop experiences. Those times when God clearly came through. Those times when you felt the presence of God in a most unique and wonderful way. You understood His strength, His grace, His love more clearly than at other times and you look back on them, you remember them. Those are important moments in our faith development. This right here, this is an important moment for these three men a moment that they will remember for the rest of their lives and it will be a moment that they will look back upon. Even Peter will speak about it later in the scripture. What is it that they experience? Well, Jesus takes them up on the mountain and as they're walking up that mountain they may have been discussing other things that had been happening that day. They may have been discussing what it is that they might see up here, but they really had no clue what was going to happen. When they get up there, one of the most incredible moments of all scripture begins to happen because Jesus is transfigured before them. It says that his clothes become whiter than any bleach on earth could ever make them. He is literally glowing before them. This is not a glowing because of some light that is being put upon Jesus. No, Jesus is the light. They are beginning to see Jesus more clearly than they have ever seen him before. He is God and they are seeing him in his true nature in his godly form. I can't imagine what that must have been like. No wonder the scripture say that all three of them were terrified.

As if that were not enough, the next moment, Moses and Elijah show up. Moses representing the law and Elijah representing the prophets. Everything in this moment is about Jesus and who he is. I cannot imagine. And yet the moment is happening. Now, scripture is clear that there are times when Jesus and Moses and Elijah are talking and then we get this from some of the other gospels. But here in Mark, the next one who speaks is Peter, remember Peter, six days ago, the one who spoke up who was so upset about the teaching that Jesus gave about him dying? Well, Peter always has something to say, doesn't he? And he has something to say here. Now, even though all three men are terrified Jesus speaks up and he says we need to build shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Shelters, why do we need shelters?

Peter didn't know what else to do. It does not say that Jesus answered Peter, it doesn't say that he rebuked him, it does not say anything. Peter will never forget what he's saying. This voice just appears out of nowhere and this is the voice of God. The voice of God simply says, “This is my dearly loved son, listen to him”. That's all it says. Listen to
him. We know that every one of us are called to listen to him because we can certainly see clearly see that Jesus is more than simply a prophet. He’s more than a good teacher; he is more because he is God. That's someone to listen to. How do you think this changed the perspective of Peter, John and James? No, I go back to those words six days ago when Jesus told them that he was going to die. At the time, Peter could not even fathom anything like that happening. But now after seeing what he has seen, Peter may rethink that. Because although six days ago, Jesus I will rise again. Peter didn't hear any of that. He only heard that he was gonna die. But now the words until I rise again, all of a sudden have a whole new meaning a whole new understanding, because all of a sudden, there's a new possibility that has been added to the equation. Could something like that happen? Could he die and then be raised again?

Maybe...maybe...Peter wanted to stay on that mountaintop. There are moments when we experienced the glory of God in our life; we want to stay right there in that moment. But the problem is, we can't live on the mountaintop, we've got to go back down into the valley. Even for these three men, their adventure comes to an end. The next thing they know, Elijah and Moses are gone. Jesus has stopped glowing, the voice has stopped speaking and there they are on the top of the mountain. But for these three men, their whole picture of Jesus has become much clearer. Because their minds have been blown. All the things that they once thought there was no possibility to, all of a sudden there might be possibilities to but Jesus has backed down the mountain. They follow like good disciples and they're talking again now as they're going down the mountain. Jesus tells them not to say anything until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. Raised from the dead. There it is, again.

At this time, Peter doesn't speak because this time, Peter is filled with the possibility that maybe, maybe this could be true. I love that...that last line in the Scripture, that last line where it says the three men, although they did not talk about it, they did ask themselves frequently about what do you think he meant? By being raised from the dead? See, this discussion was no longer about what is impossible. It had now changed to what might he have meant because now there were possibilities. What’s important for us to remember and to gain from this scripture is that wherever Jesus is, there are possibilities. In every life, there are possibilities because of who Jesus is. We live now in a time, in an era where we fully understand what it means to be raised from the dead, for Jesus is alive. That's the best news ever because it inserts hope and possibility into every situation in our life. So wherever you are right now, in your life, there is hope and possibility, because there is Jesus, because Jesus is God.

Gosh, that's good stuff.
We know what's going to happen later. We know that Peter, James and John and the rest of the disciples are going to experience the death of Jesus. They are not immune from the effects of that or the pain of that even though they have seen this. In the same way that when we experienced difficulties in life, and even though we're a Christian, we are not immune from the pain of life, from the torture sometimes of life, from the confusion and loneliness of life. Because of this mountaintop experience, while they go through the pain, and the agony of watching Jesus die, there's something that sustains them. A memory of a mountaintop experience when they saw Jesus as God, there's something in them that will remember that and it doesn't take the pain away, but it means that they are not distressed. Because of the moment, they are not destroyed because of the experience. In the same way, whatever it is that you're experiencing today, on Valentine's Day, you need to know that you're not alone. You need to know that God is here to sustain you through it. It will still be painful, it will still be hard, but you will not be destroyed. The Church is here to surround you in love while you go through whatever it is that you go through the same way the disciples had one another.

I've been a Christian now for a number of years and in those years, I've had my own mountaintop experiences. There are times when life still seems hard and overwhelming. But I can remember the mountaintop experiences, I can remember God's faithfulness, I can remember God's grace, I can remember God's redemption, I can remember the power of God at work and I'm sustained by that. I know whatever it is that I have to go through that God is with me. That is enough. That is always enough. My hope and my prayer for you on this Valentine's Day is that that will be enough for you. I don't know your names. I don't know your faces. But I know that Jesus loves you. I know that that's enough. Let me pray for you. Gracious God, we thank you for the clarity of seeing who Jesus is. For even as the image has become clear and we see Jesus, Father, help us to see you in our everyday life. Whatever it is that we face remind us of the mountaintop experiences. Remind us that you are God and that we are never alone. That you are always enough. Pour out your Spirit on all of those who are watching today. Bless them in this moment. Fill them with your hope. I ask it in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

I look forward to spending whatever time it is that God has put in his plan for us to be together. I look forward to learning more about you and your life and your mountaintop experiences. But until then, know that I'm praying for you and loving you and that Jesus is with you. Amen.