

Good morning.

It's very easy to romanticise the experience of being at high altitude - the staggering mountaintop views, the sense of peace and escape. But climbers know that mountains are places of testing. It takes a massive effort to get up. The air is thin. Breathing is hard. There are countless hidden dangers. To reach the top you have to stay focused.

This morning, for the England men's football team, the high place was most certainly the place of testing. The Azteca Stadium is over a kilometre higher than Ben Nevis. At that altitude, breathing and running at speed is massively challenging. But today we wake up in celebration because the team passed the test. Red cards. Penalties. Probably the most dramatic and tense England game ever. And yet their endurance and determination shone through, and the dream of bringing the World Cup home lives on.

The mountaintop is often the place of testing in the Bible too. For example, the prophet Elijah headed for the heights of Mount Carmel as the place to challenge the Prophets of Baal to a duel. Whose God would deliver the victory and answer prayer to bring down fire? The challenge carried incredible dangers for Elijah. He was already unpopular, not least with the king. But his prayers were answered, fire came and the people fell on their knees before the Lord.

For the Christian that story points ahead to another high place, the hill of Calvary. There Jesus was tested to the very limits as he endured the agony of crucifixion. But his love was way too deep for death to hold sway. He rose again. And because of that triumph, I and other Christians worship him as Lord.

For Elijah and for Jesus, the mountain was the place of testing. But through that testing, the mountain became the place where God was revealed and so where lives were changed.

It is going to be a huge day of celebration for England fans today. To have played such a hard game at altitude with almost no preparation and come back down with a win is a magnificent achievement.

But there are many people who have to climb even more challenging mountains than that to the Azteca Stadium. Those may be the mountains of illness or of disappointment. They may be mountains of grief or of agonising decisions. Nobody would choose to make those climbs.

But the Bible suggests that the places which test us most deeply can also become the places where strength is found and where love is revealed. Because it is the place of testing, the mountaintop can also be the place of transformation.