

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
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Matthew 17:1-9

17 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."

**The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking
new landscapes but in having new eyes.**
- Marcel Proust

Visions

It's no secret that God is calling this church to change the world. The questions are always "how?" and "when?" and "who?" How will God use us? When will God use us? Who will God send? And then the questions repeat: How will we respond? When will we respond? Who will respond? Our mission statement says that we exist to demonstrate God's love to each other and the world, but we've passed the stage where we echo those words lightly. We want to know How to demonstrate God's love; When to demonstrate God's love. We want to know Who will demonstrate God's love with us! And so, in the midst of the questions, the anticipatory waiting, we seek a vision from God.

I repeat the quote from Marcel Proust: "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." We seek God's eyes, God's vision for this church.

Today marks the end of Epiphany, the end of the season of light when the way is clear and God's light shines brilliantly in the darkness. Beginning Wednesday we enter the journey of Lent, the time in which we acknowledge that the Christian life is a difficult one, that following God requires sacrifices, requires discipline. In Lent we can not always see the way ahead of us, but, like Jesus, we choose to follow God even when the path is uncertain. But today, we are struck by Light. With Peter and James and John we climb a high mountain with Jesus and have our "mountain top" experiences.

There is something absolutely wonderful about mountain top experiences – I hope you've experienced such a thing in your life. As many of you may remember, I meet annually with 18 other clergy from around the United States who have become my best friends. And when we meet to worship and to share together, someone most always suggests that we just build a commune and stay on the mountain, away from the needs and requirements of the many churches we serve. What we have on our mountain is very, very real. The light of Christ settles on our spirits and brings more joy than we ever dared to imagine. And, like Peter, James, and John, we don't quite know what to do with it. We want to bottle it up for the whole world and we want to contain it deep in our souls. But we don't want to step down the mountain at the end of our time together.

Peter looked at Jesus, transfigured in light before his eyes and decided that he and Moses and Elijah needed a commune up there on the mountain – they needed a way to stay in the light, and Peter, being the handy one (and the wordy one), decided that he should build it. But it wasn't to be. The revelation wasn't complete. For then a voice from heaven announced to Peter and James and John that Jesus was God's son, and that he should be listened to. By that time the three cower in fear and then Jesus TOUCHES them. They've seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, and now they feel – the warmth of their caring friend. They feel safety. They feel comfort. They feel overwhelmed . . . for no longer do they see the light or hear the voice. They see only the familiar, calling them to come back down the mountain and to keep quiet.

They had seen a VISION that, for them, changed their lives! How dare they be asked to keep it quiet! As I read the scripture I realize that the vision they have seen would change their today and their tomorrows. They would mark time from the moment in which they heard the voice of God, they saw the light of Jesus with the prophets, they felt the hand of the Christ. Yet they are told to keep quiet. And why? I can only assume that compared to the resurrection to come, their vision would pale. So the command to keep quiet was actually a command also to wait and to watch, for more was on its way.

I couldn't help but notice that Peter, James, John, and Jesus all experienced the same vision. I've been struck lately by the fact that many of you are seeking God's vision for your lives. And many of you are being called into ministries you never dreamed of because you've allowed yourself to hear the voice of God, to see the vision to which you are being called, and to feel the touch of the living Christ. But for the church, God's vision must come to the whole community. We caught a part of that vision last year as we corporately committed our lives to God's desire to fill us with life so that God's word would continue to spread long after we have gone. But the vision continues and we desperately want to see where God is leading us.

I meet with a small group of church members to pray and seek God's vision for the church every Wednesday. I meet with the elders of the church once a month and ask us where we see God already at work. In the past year we have seen God at work in so many aspects of the church's life – in church officers and children, in seamstresses, in music, in volunteer copiers, in stewardship campaigns, at funerals, in landscapes, in people and even on the golf course. And the vision is not over. The radiance of Christ continues to shine, the glory continues to be revealed. As we are seeking God's will for the church, we are also coming to understand that the vision is not only for us, but for the entire community. We are asking how God's glory can transform our hearts so that we can live a life of mission, so that we can demonstrate God's love not only to each other but also to the world.

We are asking God to open our eyes so that we may see the visions of truth Thou hast for us. And we step down the mountain because a gentle hand touches us and reminds us that the vision is only going to get better as we continue the work that has been started. The glory will be revealed in ways we can not imagine. We need not new landscapes, but new eyes through which to see the vision. And God will reveal the vision of the church to the whole community as one by one we offer ourselves to God, singing fervently in our hearts, "Change the World through me!"

As God reveals the vision for each of your individual ministries, remember also that God will use each of us to fulfill the vision for the whole church. I urge you to step down the mountain, filled with the life-changing glory that has been revealed to you, and I urge you to ask how God can use you to change this community. I urge you to ask God to open your eyes to the glory that is being revealed and together we will grasp the fullness of God's vision for us. Let us pray.

*God of grace and God of glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power.
Crown Thine ancient church's story,
Bring her bud to glorious flower.*

*Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the facing of this hour,
For the facing of this hour.¹*

Amen.

¹ *Words:* [Harry E. Fosdick](#), 1930. The title of Fosdick's 1956 autobiography *The Living of These Days* echoes the lyrics. *Music:* Cwm Rhondda, [John Hughes](#), 1907