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SermonTitle: "Their Eyes Were Opened"
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SermonText: Matthew 17:1-9

Some of you have already noticed that Easter comes very early this year, and so this Sunday finds us on the brink of Ash Wednesday and Lent.

Christmas was not quite six weeks ago. Easter is seven weeks from today. That's a lot of ground to cover in a short amount of time, so we've had to jump around a little.

In case you've missed anything, here's where we've been over the past few weeks.

Bethlehem, manger, baby, O Holy Night.

Mean ol' King Herod, the wise men, We Three Kings.

John the Baptist, Jesus baptized, this is my son the beloved.

Jesus out in the wilderness, he fasted for 40 days before being tempted by the devil, who bet a fiddle made of gold against his soul — no wait, that last part's from *The Devil Went Down to Georgia* by The Charlie Daniels band.

No, Satan tried to manipulate the word of God so that Jesus would do what the devil wanted him to do, but Jesus refused.

Now we're jumping ahead past a lot of really good stuff. Jesus has called the disciples, they've followed. Jesus has been poking at the religious conservatives and not making many friends.

Then we come to today's reading.

Peter, James, and John go with Jesus. What do we know about the apostles from the early days of Jesus' ministry? Were they a humble and collegial group?

Heck, no. They were anything but.

In fact, given what we know about the disciples, I would expect that as these 3 walked off with Jesus as some kind of "inner circle" they might very well have done whatever the first century equivalent of thumbing their noses at the other Apostles.

They went up a mountain and something amazing happened. They saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes, standing talking with two of the greats ancestors of their faith.

Peter, who never seemed to be a loss for an inappropriate word, offers to build 3 dwellings, 3 memorials. He sees Moses and Elijah, and his first response is that he has to *do* something. We talked about this a bit last week.

Peter couldn't just **be** there. He had to do something. Anything. He probably said the first thing that came to his mind. He didn't say "**We'll** build you three dwellings" he said that he would do it himself. Remember this is the same guy who later drags a net with 153 fish on shore to feed 6 people. He was a little, shall we say, **exuberant**.

For all we know, Peter wanted to build this monument so that he could point to it and say "Hey, that's where I saw Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah" to further pump up his own ego.

But he didn't even get a chance to finish his sentence:

While 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!"

Does that sound at all familiar? It should. Flip back to Matthew chapter 3 verse 16 and you will read

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

On the mountaintop we hear the same pronouncement of Jesus as the Son of God, but we get something else too.

We get an instruction.

Is that instruction "Build a monument?" Does God want them to create a place where they can simply gather together and sit around and talk about what they've seen? No.

God's instructions are very clear.

"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Listen to him.

Last week we talked about *being* versus *doing*. Peter wanted to do... and he would eventually get his chance. But he wasn't ready. His being wasn't ready. His eyes weren't ready, his ears weren't ready, his heart wasn't ready.

Their eyes were opened on that mountain. So were their ears. So, I believe, were their hearts.

They finally saw who Jesus was. They heard who Jesus was. They believed who Jesus was.

So where were you when your eyes were open?

I know you probably weren't standing on a high mountaintop with Jesus and heard a voice from the clouds... but have you seen with your eyes who He really is? Have you heard with your own ears who He really is? Have you known in your own heart who He really is?

For some folks it may have happened a long time ago. Something happened and you believed in a way that you just hadn't before.

Maybe it's been a long time ago,
but you haven't forgotten it.

Maybe it's gotten buried under a whole lot of other stuff
that life has piled on you,
but it's still there.

Maybe you heard something, or saw something, or even felt something, but didn't know what it was, but you knew that it was something different, something special.

For some folks it might happen at the birth of a child.

For some it might take place at the side of a loved one's deathbed.

For others it might be at the grocery store, or simply walking around on a warm summer's day.

Where were you when your life was touched by God?

Were you here, in this church or another?

Perhaps you experienced something as seemingly vague as what John Wesley described as his heart feeling strangely warmed.

You don't have to be able to explain it or describe it. But I suspect most of us have a time in our lives we can think of and say "That's when I knew" or "That's when I really believed" or "That's when I felt closest to God."

Maybe there are some here who can't think of a time like that. That's OK, I suspect there are a lot of faithful church folks who might be in the same boat.

In either case, I want to suggest to you that Lent is a time of self-reflection. I don't mean that you ought to sit around and wallow in your sins saying "Woe is me." Neither should you cruise through it saying "Perfect is me." In fact, I'll leave you with one simple suggestion for this Lenten season.

Imagine that you were up there on that mountaintop, imagine that you saw Jesus in all His glory, heard a voice from heaven telling you without question that this was truly God's Son and imploring you to listen to Him.

Ask yourself two questions:

1) What do you think Jesus might say to you? Not "what might Jesus say to the whole world" or "what might Jesus say to my neighbor" but What would Jesus say to you? Would it be a word of comfort, to assure you that your sins truly were forgiven? Would it be a word of challenge, prompting you to make some change in your life, how you live, what you do? What would Jesus say to you?

2) The second question is simple: Will you listen?