**Text**: Mark 9:2-9
**Title:** A Glimpse into the Future

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

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 It started off like an ordinary day. Jesus and three of his closest friends go up on a high mountain. Nothing odd about that especially if you live near mountains. Jesus often went up to a high hill to pray and to rest. No doubt, this trio of disciples was looking forward to some much needed "R and R.” Also, some time inretreat and prayer. NOTHING extraordinary about that! No sooner had they arrived at `the retreat center' than Jesus was suddenly `transfigured'**.** One might imagine that he appeared to "glow from within". There was a powerful dose of light, all at once and one couldn't miss it or the person it transfigured!

 We know that Elijah and Moses were also with Jesus...and that they had not been heard from for hundreds of years. But from there on there is nothing about this story that is NOT Extraordinary. As they were talking, MOSES, the great law-giver was paying his respect to Jesus, the great fulfiller of the law. Elijah, the great prophet of fire was bowing down before Jesus, the greater prophet. Here were the sainted elders, long since passed on.., coming to WORSHIP the one they had waited for and pointed to. Someone could well mistake all of this for a classic Halloween story! Is it any wonder that Peter, James and John were awestruck, maybe rubbing their eyes, or shaking themselves, or pinching their flesh to be sure they were conscious? The **`**retreat plans' had taken an unexpected turn.

 Further still.., a strange cloud hovered overhead, and from it God staged an unscheduled `news briefing', a theophany**;** and, as at Jesus' baptism, God was again clearly identifying JESUS as a MAN with a MESSAGE WELL WORTH HEARING. Responding much like you and I would do in situations that catch us off guard, Peter and the others reacted out of courtesy... with mouthfuls of `fearful mumblings' and they managed to mutter something about,building shelters right there on the spot in order to CAPTURE and PRESERVE this GOD who had come so close, and then to have MOSES and ELIJAH there too!!! What an opportunity!What an interview! What a story! It could mean OVERNIGHT FAME!!! But it was not to be, because God had a completely different reason for the `news briefing'**.** God banned the construction proposal with a cloud and a voice. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" That did it!

 And so as Jesus and his friends began to descend the heights of this extraordinary retreat site, he said to them, "Tell no one the vision.” A fair request. No one would have believed it anyway! But do you know what? THEY BELIEVED IT. ALL THREE OF THEM BELIEVED IT. They had been there. Their lives had been marked, and they no longer could look at things in the way they had before!! They had been enlightened. They had managed a rare glimpse into the future.

 Sometimes we go *"just looking"* too. Cruising the malls we are overwhelmed by ALL the choices... and AT THE SAME TIME uninterested in what appears to be ***"****more of the same."*  Ever spent time looking at things you don’t need or want? SOME PEOPLE spend all their lives *"just looking."* They look at property and goods. They look at educational or business opportunities. They look at relationships they might develop. They look at God both within and without the church....NEVER fully WILLING to invest their energies or emotions or economic security in ANYTHING......because of the risks involved.

 These persons drift "in" and "out" of jobs without EVER finding a vocation; they drift "in" and "out" of relationships without ever daring to love; they drift "in" and "out" of communities without ever casting a vote or dropping anchor; and depending upon their need for baptisms, weddings, or funeral services, they drift "in" and "out" of the church without ever opening their hearts to the SPIRIT OF GOD..or feeling the pulse of the Body of Christ. No, our generation has not outgrown the human phenomenon of *"just looking".*

 The book of James reveals an author who felt a similar frustration with would-be-Christians who were bystanders and bench-warmers. The writer reminds us that just HEARING the Word - The GOOD NEWS of Jesus -is NOT enough! We must be hearers who “do” and *"doers who**act".* What we learn from Scripture IS that A BIBLICAL FAITH finds plenty of precedence for "action without a plan", but little evidence of "plans without action."

- Abraham didn't have a plan....,

 ...but he packed up and left home.

- Moses didn't have a clue...

 ...but he confronted Pharaoh with an ultimatum.

- Rahab didn't have a friend...

 ...but she hid Joshua's spies to Jericho.

- Elijah didn't have a hope...

 ...but he defeated all the prophets of Ba'al.

 - Nehemiah the Planner, didn't have a country...

 ...but he rebuilt the Wall of Jerusalem.

- Mary didn't have a name...

 ...but she bore the Son of God.

- John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, didn't have a home...

 ...but he made the wilderness his pulpit.

- Peter the impetuous didn't have a backbone...

 ...but he became the "rock" of the church.

- Saul of Tarsus didn't have a heart...

 ...but Paul became the spokesman for the Gentiles.

- Jesus of Nazareth didn't have a sin...

 ...but he suffered and died on a cross for OUR sake and for OUR salvation.

FAITHFUL Christians must be "doing"..., not "just looking". The whole crux of the faith, the "perfect law" as James suggests, IS that we DON'T know every detail, every contingency, every development that awaits us. But we DO know WHO is in charge. A life of faith demands that we work hard but know that ultimately GOD is in control.

Here at Bethel, we are about the work of faithfully preparing for our future as God’s people in this 21st century time of rapid change and renewal. Holy Scripture calls us to go "beyond" even our best efforts at planning, and to prophesy our way forward in life. We who have HEARD the Word are called upon to ACT UPON IT. James warns us to "Be aware" of the natural tendency to be ***"****just looking****"*** to be content with *"just hearing"* ...even WITHIN the church! We are called to stand up, step out, enter in...and take all the risks! And so today, we’ll stand and sing “Rise Up, O Saints of God.” We’ll do physically what we promise God we’ll do spiritually**,** socially, emotionally and intellectually.

 If you've read Robert Fulghum's AllI Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, you remember the wonderfully true story of Larry Walters. He was a 33 year-old truck driver who was sitting in his lawn chair in his back yard one day wishing he could fly**.**  For as long as he could remember he had wanted to fly, but he'd never had the time or money or opportunity to be a pilot**.** Hang gliding was out because there was no good place for gliding near his home. So he spent summer afternoons sitting in his backyard in his ordinary old aluminum chair - the kind with the webbing and the rivets, like you have in your backyard.

 One day Larry hooked 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons to his chair. He put on a parachute, hooked a 6-pack of beer to his chair, put a CB radio in his lap, tied a paper bag full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to his leg, and slung a BB-gun over his shoulder to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down. He lifted off in his chair expecting to climb a couple hundred feet over his neighborhood. But instead HE SHOT UP 11,000 feet right through the approach corridor to the Los Angeles International Airport. When asked by the press why he did it, Larry answered: "Well, you can't just sit there." When asked if he was scared, he answered; YES, WONDERFULLY SO."

 Larry Walters will never be the same again after his trip to the mountain IN HIS LAWN CHAIR. He knew that he needed to get beyond *"just looking****."*** NOW he's SEEN things and FELT things that will forever shape the way he lives the rest of his life. NOW there would never be ANYTHING he couldn't face. And so it was with Peter, James and John**.**  Up on the mountains there were the risks they took, they had been given nothing less than a glimpse into the future**.** They had seen pastthe suffering and death that Jesus had PREDICTED; They had seen past their own doubtsand fears and moments of faithlessness.

 On the Mount of Transfiguration, for one BRIEF moment God had CRACKED open THE DOOR to the END OF TIME**...** and they had seen how history would be worked out. YOU and I are here, on this Transfiguration Sunday because WE HAVE SEEN how history will be worked out!! Through parents, teachers, pastors, neighbors, friends, and YES, some-times through love's demands towards our enemies, WE HAVE LISTENED to our GOD's BELOVED SON. WE have heard the stories that are the story of Jesus and his Love. The promise of His coming. His humble birth. His exemplary life and His faithfulministry. He was misunderstood, falsely accused, tried, unjustly punished, and put to death in order that WE, you and I, might live our lives free of the heavy burdens of guilt, injustice, dishonesty, selfishness, and the fears that otherwise disable us and make us self-serving and small.

 James beckons us to "look in the mirror"..SO THAT we can be freed to "SEE BEYOND OURSELVES", to see BEYOND our fears and doubts about the future.James invites us to"take all the risks**”** and to act in such a way thatOTHERS CANNOT HELP BUT SEE that "by our love" we are doers of the Word. We heard this week from neighboring congregations who are praying for us here during this interim time. Our call is to show that our faith is shaped, fabricated, designed "in sharp image" by what we hope for.In a Tree, in Christ, in the suffering servant of God who gave Himself "FOR US, LET US TAKE HEART. LET US "rise" in the unity of one spiritto embrace the promise of that which we have not yet clearly seen. Let us teach one another that IN A TREE, in death and resurrection, in baptism and confirmation, in confession and absolution, in prayer and meditation...THERE IS HOPE. Let us "DO" the spiritual work of "Being Open" to God's future, even as by faith the deaf man "heard the Word of Jesus" and responded with clear and unimpeded speech. As we ready our hearts and minds for the Lenten Season, let us TEACH ONE ANOTHER that "in a tree" there is HOPE**.** LET US teach one another that in Christ we can "DO NOTHING ELSE" but take ALL the risks.

 In conversation with one of our members this past week, we claimed together the fact that this interim period is a prime time for spiritual renewal and, at its heart, this is God’s time for teaching and for learning as a church what it means to become a learning organization reflecting the love of Christ to those both inside and outside this community of faith.

 ***When I reflect on teaching (Gerhard Frost writes),***

 ***I can't forget the words of an Olympic ski champion, a man for whom two minutes is a career.***

 ***"Go faster than you think you can....on every part of the course; “ take all the risks."***

 ***Take all the risks. Great words for one who is to teach.***

 ***Take the risk of loving; it means that you'll be hurt.***

 ***Take the risk of listening; it means that you will learn and will have to change.***

 ***Take the risk of responding; little by little, it will cost you your life!***

 ***Teaching is response. Learning occurs within relationships, and RELATIONSHIP involves risk, the risk of knowing….and being known.***

 Let's be working together to rise above the temptation to become too comfortable with *"just looking.****"*** Let's act out the faith we claim...and in so doing CLAIM the "perfect gift" of faith that God has given us in the love of Christ. Let's take a modern day cue from an ancient prophet or two who didn't fear action without a plan. Remember Abraham, Moses, and Mary?

 "Remember me", Jesus pleaded. This church CAN STAND as an exciting alternative to a culture content to *"just look****."*** Do you BELIEVE it? Then let's trust in the spirit and "do it"...together! AMEN.