

Sermon Notes – February 14, 2021*“A Divine Appointment With God”*

(Mark 9:2-9)

I heard a story about a young woman who asked her older co-worker, “Why do you always go to church every Sunday?” The older co-worker said, “Well I go there to meet God whom I know in Jesus Christ. I can meet him other places, but there is something special about going to the church and having a divine appointment with God. My problem is that sometimes I operate on autopilot and my mind is on family, school, work, or something else, and I miss my divine appointment with God. But I go there to meet God.” The younger co-worker said, “Now let me get this right – you go to church every Sunday and God meets you there?” The older lady said, “Yes, I go to church every Sunday. But, for some unknown reasons, because of my mind and my attitude, sometimes I only meet God one out of every seven or eight worship services.” The young lady said, “Well, if that’s true, how come you go every Sunday?” The older lady said, “Because I never know when that’s going to be the Sunday that God and I meet, and He speaks to me and I hear something that He’s saying to me in the service.”

I want you to know today that Jesus took Simon Peter, James, and John up on the mountain to have a divine appointment with God. And there, Jesus was transfigured – He was transformed. All of a sudden, Matthew’s gospel said, “his face shone like the sun and his clothes were as white as bleach could get them. He was dazzling bright.” Now keep in mind, they went up on Mount Herman – that’s probably about 8-or-9,000 feet above sea level. They climbed a high altitude. They got tired from their walk and the disciples were sleepy. In fact, in one of the gospels it said they were sleepy, and all of a sudden they are startled and are half-awake. They hear somebody talking, and it’s Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah. Peter, who’s not known to be short of words – you’ve never met anybody like that, have you? They’ve always got something to say about everything. Some people are frightened and they can’t say a word; others just babble on – and Peter was one of those folks. He said, “Well, Lord, let us just build you a tent – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” The scriptures indicate that Jesus didn’t say anything. All of a

sudden a cloud overwhelmed them and overshadowed them. (Do you remember in the Old Testament how a cloud represented the presence of God, and that cloud guided the people of Israel to the Promised Land -- "It was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night." It represented the presence of God.) So, all of a sudden this voice comes out of this cloud and it says, "This is my son! Listen to him. I have chosen him. He is the one I love. Listen to him." And the scriptures said they fell down on their knees; they were humbled and they hid their faces in the ground. They were probably shaking. Can't you imagine? And then, in one of the gospels it said, Jesus went over and touched them. He said, "Don't be afraid," and they stood up and all they saw was Jesus; Moses and Elijah were gone.

When they left that mountain and went back down into the valley, they had come to know the divinity of Jesus Christ. They knew that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets. Elijah was the greatest of the Jewish prophets in Israel. Moses was the one who brought the law (the 10 Commandments) down from Mount Sinai. Both of these men had had mountain-top experiences. And here's Jesus appearing with Moses and Elijah. Do you remember his words - "I came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill it"? Here was Jesus - the fulfilment of the law and the prophecy - greater than Moses and Elijah. God gave them a vision of who Jesus was. They saw Jesus as the Son of God - for who he truly was. God revealed the glory of his Son, and it strengthened the faith of these disciples and deepened their trust in Jesus. When they came off the mountain, they didn't fully understand it and Jesus said, "Don't tell anybody until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Jesus knew that they wouldn't completely understand it.

Have you ever had an experience of something that impacted your life or changed how you thought or felt about something? Some of you know the name James Irwin -- he was one of the astronauts that went to the moon. In his autobiography, he tells that when he and the other astronauts flew to the moon, "there was something that we gained -- a new sense of ourselves, the vastness of the earth, and the nearness of God. After we got on the moon and when we were coming back, I knew it

was going to change me, and it did. On the moon, the total picture of the power of God and Jesus was made abundantly clear to me. Everything that I had ever learned in Sunday School and church about God, and read in the scriptures, was true. I sensed the presence and the power of God, and it impacted my life. It strengthened my faith in Jesus Christ.” Going to the moon did that for James Irwin.

There’s a friend of mine whose church does “Forty Days of Love” during the Lenten season. The first week of the Lenten season, he asked the congregation to write a note of loving concern and appreciation to somebody who has made an impact on their life - a positive impact in their life. This one gentleman came up to the Pastor after the service was over. He said, “Listen, Pastor. I am kind of a macho-guy. I played football in high school and college. I hunt and fish. This love note stuff sounds kind of syrupy and sentimental to me. I’m not into that kind of stuff.” The Pastor said, “Well that’s okay. You do whatever you feel led to do.” The next Sunday, he came back to church and he told the Pastor, “I need to talk to you. I just wanted to apologize for what I said to you about the Forty Days of Love last week.” The Pastor asked, “What happened?” The man replied, “Well, I had an experience this past Wednesday.” The Pastor asked, “What happened on Wednesday?” The man replied, “I got one of those letters.” The Pastor said, “What letters?” The man replied, “You know... one of those notes of love and appreciation. It impacted my life. It was from somebody in this church from whom I never expected to receive. You know I’m not a Deacon or a Sunday School teacher - I’m just an average person in the church. But I had done something for them when they were younger and they had never forgotten it. They watched my life day in and day out. They see me at work and different places and at church. I made an impact on their life and the letter so touched me, Pastor. I want to let you know that on Saturday, I sat down and wrote ten of those notes to people who have touched my life.” Sometimes, God speaks to us and breaks through our lives in lots of different ways; sometimes it’s in worship; sometimes it may be something you do during the week, but God impacts our lives. He wants to change us, to help us to trust Him and believe in Him more. Those disciples had an experience that impacted their lives and they were strengthened in their faith in Jesus. Their trust in him was deepened.

You know, Peter, James, and John were three disciples who Jesus considered his “inner circle.” They had a hard time accepting that Jesus was going to be this Messiah that was different than what they had expected. You see, they wanted a political Messiah – one who was going to overthrow the Romans and put the Israelites back into power. Jesus kept trying to tell them that he wasn’t that kind of Messiah. And then you remember that Peter, when Jesus first started talking about how he was going to suffer and be betrayed by the elders and the scribes, and he was going to be killed and rise in three days, Peter pulled him aside and said, “No, Lord. You can’t go through this. This is not the Messiah that we have. We can’t let that happen to you.” And Jesus said to him, “Get thee behind me, Satan. For you do not know the ways of God.” *You see Simon Peter, James, and John were three of his close disciples and Jesus gave them a deeper glimpse of who he was and what he was about.* And yet, he told them, when they went back down into the valley, “Don’t tell anybody yet” – because Jesus knew that he had a lot of people to see and things to do before he was crucified. He wanted to preach and heal and he had more to do before God’s appointed time for him to be crucified. They didn’t quite get it, but Jesus wanted them to be strengthened in their faith. ***God wants you and I to be strengthened in our faith.***

I want you to notice something else in that story: God told those disciples, “Listen to him!” – that means hear and obey him - “Do what he says. You can trust him. He’s the Son of God and God is speaking through him. Listen to him, guys.” *Do you have a hard time listening? I didn’t say hearing... I said listening.* I heard a cute story about King Henry VII of England. Two hundred years ago, it was a time when children were to be seen and not heard. They were sitting in the dining room in the castle and they were having their dinner. Prince David was trying to get his grandfather (King Henry VII)’s attention. All of a sudden one of the adults said, “Shhh! Shhh! You can’t talk right now!” Prince David got real quiet and kept eating. Finally, his grandfather (King Henry VII) said, “Prince David, what did you want to say to your grandfather?” He said, “Well grandfather, it’s too late now. You had a caterpillar on a piece the lettuce in your salad, but you’ve already eaten it now.” Sometimes it pays to listen to your kids, doesn’t it? And it pays to listen

to your spouse, and family and friends, ***but most of all - to listen to God, because God wants to have a divine appointment with you and me.***

Sometimes he chooses to speak to us in church – sometimes outside the church or at home – or in other places. But today we’ve come to have a divine appointment with God, to let him speak and to say something to us. What does he want to say to you and to me? And are we listening to him? Are we hearing and obeying him?

Jesus gave those disciples a glimpse of who he was and it impacted their life. I don’t know about you, but most of us have had services, retreats, workshops, conferences, or somewhere we’ve been and something changed our life. We wanted to tell other people, but we didn’t know how to explain it to them. I can imagine those disciples wanted to tell the other disciples what they had experienced. But, they knew they weren’t quite ready to tell it, and the other disciples wouldn’t understand it since they had not experienced what they had on the mountaintop.

I read about an experience of Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor. When Russia was attacking the French and Napoleon was in Russia, he got separated from his soldiers. He went into a furrier shop. While he was there, he was trying to hide from the Russians and he got up under some furs. The shop owner put more furs on him. All of a sudden, the Russians came in and they asked, “Where’s the Emperor Napoleon?” The shop owner said, “I haven’t seen him.” They busted up the shop looking for him, but couldn’t find him. They took a sword and stuck it into some of the furs, but they still couldn’t find him. Finally the Russian soldiers left and Napoleon’s French soldiers got there. They came in the shop and Napoleon climbed out from under the furs. The shop owner looked over at Napoleon and said, “Emperor, I would like to ask you a question. What’s it like to know that any moment could be the end of your life – like a few minutes ago?” Napoleon’s soldiers grabbed the owner, put his hands behind his back, tied them up, and put a blindfold on him. Napoleon had them take him out in front of the shop and stand him up blindfolded. The shop owner heard them cocking their rifles and he heard Napoleon say, “Aim.” (But what he didn’t know was that Napoleon told the soldiers not to shoot him.) All of a sudden, one of the soldiers went over and un-blindfolded the shop owner and untied his hands.

Napoleon went over to him and asked, “Now, do you know what it feels like knowing your life could have been ended? Some experiences in life you can’t understand until you experience it yourself.” Jesus knew that those disciples would not be able to understand this experience until after his death and resurrection. And he knew that they wouldn’t be able to explain it to the other disciples right now.

In summary, first I want you to know that Jesus gives us divine appointments to meet him – sometimes in church and other places. Sometimes we don’t meet God because our mind is distracted with thinking too much about lunch, family, work, school, and everything else. 2) God gives us experiences to strengthen our faith and deepen our trust in him. 3) God wants us to listen to him – to hear him and obey him. So, today I want to ask you... are you listening to God speak to you - and have you had your divine appointment with God this day – this week? If not, I pray that you will be open and receptive to what God wants to say, whether it be on the mountain or in the valley.

One last thing I want you to notice in that story is that before they went up on the mountain, Jesus was healing people. When he came down off of that spiritual high with the disciples and God had affirmed and reaffirmed his mission, revealed his identity to the disciples, he went back down to the valley -- he had to go back and heal people. Somebody was waiting on him – “Jesus, we tried to get your disciples to heal, but they couldn’t do it!” – and Jesus healed a guy who was in convulsions.

When you come down off of those highs, remember that God’s Spirit has touched you and his power that was there on the mountaintop is with you, even in the valley – so that you can live in the valley and serve him and live for him. Hold onto the mountaintop experiences – those divine appointments with God, but realize that we live most of the time in the valley. And God’s power – God’s Holy Spirit – is with us on the mountain and in the valleys where we live and serve. Amen.