

Mark 9:2-9

Transfiguration; February 11& 12, 2024

On July 2, 1982, Larry Walters, a 33-year old truck driver, made a remarkable flight sitting in a lawn chair with 45 helium-filled weather balloons attached. For as long as he could remember, he had wanted to fly but he had never had the time nor the money nor the 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, the kind that many of us may have or have. One day Larry came up with an idea. He remembered seeing a old weather balloon at a military surplus store. If he could purchase these used balloons, fill them with helium, he might be able to take flight in his lawn chair from his backyard.

So, on July 2, 1982, Larry filled those 45 weather balloons with helium. He sat down in his chair with the balloons tied to the chair. He had everything that he needed to take his flight. He put a CB radio in his lap, tied a paper bag full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, carried a BB gun to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down. (He did have a parachute, just in case something went wrong.) He had done his calculations, and he expected to climb up a couple hundred feet over his neighborhood. Instead, when he cut the rope holding him to the ground, he shot up in the air much higher than anticipated. He would eventually get to about 16,000 feet above the ground. As he keeps going up, his girlfriend at the time and his friends began to talk frantically to him on the radio. He assured them that he was okay. So, they began to follow him on the ground.

As he was flying in his lawn chair, he began to drift into an approach corridor to the Los Angeles International Airport. He asked his friends to call the airport and let them know that he was on an unauthorized flight. As that was happening, a couple of pilots from commercial aircraft, coming in for a landing, began to report a man flying a lawn chair attached to balloons. But there was no good place for him to try to land. So, he continued on sitting on his lawn chair. Finally, he found a place that he thought he could try to land. So, he pulled out his BB gun to begin to shoot at his balloons. He had to do this carefully so as to not become unbalanced and fall out of his chair. He was able to shoot out a couple, and then he dropped his gun. Eventually, he did land, even though he got tied up in some powerlines at the end.

Larry became an overnight sensation. His daring escapade captured worldwide media attention and inspired both a movie and numerous imitators. He found himself on TV entertainment shows. Larry Walters' life would never be the same after his trip to the mountains in his lawn chair. What Larry saw that day in the sky was more spectacular than he ever could have imagined. All he could say about it was: "Wow."

I think Peter, James and John felt the same way as they saw Jesus transfigured before them. **"After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus."** For a few brief moments, they were given a glimpse into the future. They saw past the suffering and death of Jesus, which Jesus had spoken about just a few days before this event. They could see past their doubts, their fears. For one brief shining moment Jesus cracked open the door of heaven, and they saw Jesus in all of glory. As they stood there, they didn't know what to say. All they could say was *Wow!* This was going to be a day to remember.

After all, this was the kind of Messiah that they were looking for. For two and half years, Jesus' disciples had seen some pretty amazing things. They saw how he changed water into wine. They saw the five thousand fed from five small loaves of bread and two fish. They had seen Jesus drive demons out of people. They saw him calm the storm. They had listened to his parables and illustrations. They were amazed at how clearly Jesus could teach all kinds of different truths. They had experienced highs and lows over those years.

But now that time that they had with Jesus was getting closer to the end. Jesus had come into this world with only one purpose in mind. He didn't come to setup an earthly kingdom. He didn't come to change the politics of his day. He didn't come to get the Romans off the backs of the Jewish nation. He **"came to seek and to save what was lost."** (Luke 19:10) As Jesus got closer and closer to the day that he would be crucified, he began to prepare his disciples more and more for that day when he would make the payment for the sins of the world. Every day would be one step closer to the cross.

Even after all this time, the disciples had high expectations of Jesus. Their expectations for Jesus were through the roof. The more miracles they saw; the more sermons listened to; the more authority that they saw come through the words and action of Jesus; the more they expected Jesus to restore the kingdom of David. When Jesus asked his disciples **“Who do people say I am?”** (Mark 8:27), that Peter answers: **“You are the Messiah,”** (Mark 8:29) **“the Son of the living God.”** (Matthew 16:16)

But then Jesus dropped the bomb on them: **“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”** This was not what they expected! This was not their expectation from Jesus! Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? You prayed so hard for something from Jesus, and he didn’t make it happen. You wanted plans to go a certain way, and they went the opposite direction. You felt as if your world was crashing down around you, and nothing seemed to stop it.

Jesus knew that these men needed to hear the words of God the Father: **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** In other words, God is telling them: *Everything is going perfectly and according to plan!* God had promised this world a Messiah. Moses had brought God’s law to this world, and wrote the first words of the Bible. Elijah was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. He proclaimed how God’s word would be fulfilled. The two biggest people in the Old Testament are standing there next to the Son of God talking about God’s plan for this world. God wanted not only his disciples to hear and see this plan on that mountain top. He wants you and I to see that same plan as well.

He wants us to see who he really is – the Son of God. Not just the Son of God to stay on that mountain top, but the Son of God who came down that mountain to go up another on a cross. Jesus knew what laid ahead of him, and he doesn’t even hesitate to go to the cross. He knows that the cross is not the end – the empty tomb is. He will pay the price for sin with his death and he will prove by rising from the dead.

Jesus was looking past the cross. He wants you to look past the cross. Look past all the suffering and troubles of this world. Look past it all and see the glory of Jesus in heaven. Jesus wants us to see the view from 16,000 feet, not just a few hundred of feet above our neighborhood. Jesus wants us to look at his plan and say *Wow!* Jesus will stop at nothing to take care of you. Then we can join with Peter in saying: **“It is good for us to be here.”** Amen.