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“FIRST SUNDAY IN NEW CHURCH”

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The Recovery Church

^{Luke 28-31} About eight days after saying this, Jesus climbed the mountain to pray, taking Peter, John, and James along. While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white. At once two men were there talking with him. They turned out to be Moses and Elijah—and what a glorious appearance they made! They talked over his exodus, the one Jesus was about to complete in Jerusalem.

³²⁻³³ Meanwhile, Peter and those with him were slumped over in sleep. When they came to, rubbing their eyes, they saw Jesus glowing and the two men standing with him. When Moses and Elijah had left, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, this is a great moment! Let’s build three memorials: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He blurted this out without thinking.

³⁴⁻³⁵ While he was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: “This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him.”

³⁶ When the sound of the voice died away, they saw Jesus there alone. They were speechless. And they continued speechless, said not one thing to anyone during those days of what they had seen.

Most of us, at some time another, have had glowing experiences, times when we recognize clearly that our lives are about to be, or have been, forever changed, times when we absolutely glow. How else would you explain people's uncanny ability to ask the right question at the right time, if we didn't emit some kind of glow: Are you in love? Are you expecting? Did you get a raise? Did you finally break par?

- Have you ever watched a child open a card and find \$5.00.
- Have you ever watched a senior open an acceptance letter from their first pick school.
- Have you ever watched a teenager open the door after their first goodnight kiss.
- Have you ever watched a golfer after they search around the green only to find the ball in the hole.
- Have you ever watched a mother or a grandmother when they hold a new baby.
- Have you ever watched a dad when he walks his daughter down the aisle.

No words are needed, the look says it all, the glow speaks volumes... joy, disappointment, awe, disbelief, completeness, loneliness... every word is written on the face. This morning's text is woven in such a way that we are given a glimpse as to what it means to have a life forever changed by the knowledge and presence of God. But we don't have to go that far do we? For almost 450 Sundays we have heard someone walk in front like our speaker for today and share a story of hope with our congregation. Now, if there are any clergy in our midst I want to share a little bit of the miracle of The Recovery Church. Here it is... we have never asked someone to share their personal testimony of hope. We pass around a clipboard for people to sign up... but every story of hope for the past nine years has been a volunteer. When lives change, when hope returns, when the smile and giggles are welcomed home... that is when the glow happens.

Some years ago, a young mother wrote about what happened when she moved into a new subdivision. Here is what she said:

“We tried everything we could think of to make this place something other than a real-estate development. We tried organized recreation, community picnics, and square dancing. We formed a women's club and held bridge parties, and started a garden club. We had parents' organization and evening discussion groups. We tried everything. But it was not until the church came that we changed from a subdivision into a community and became real neighbors to one another.”

Friends, people in recovery need a church. Let me give you four reasons why you come to church!

The first reason is that it is a place to slow down to learn something and to listen. A man once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. He was snapping at his wife and children, choking down his food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated every time there was an unexpected interruption in his day. Before long, things around their home started reflecting the pattern of his hurry-up life style. He said the situation was becoming unbearable. Then it happened.

After supper one evening his younger daughter wanted to tell him something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, **“Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin’ and I’ll tell you really fast.”**

Suddenly realizing her frustration, the man answered, **“Honey, you can tell me -- and you don’t have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.”** He said he has never forgotten her answer: **“Then listen slowly.”**

I can hear God's voice saying to Peter, James, and John: **“This is my Son, listen to him! Slow down. Don't be so quick to move things your way, to shape the world as you see it Peter. Don't be so quick to join the rat pack and be number one John. Don't**

try to beat your colleagues to the first position James. Slow down. My Son is trying to show you another way, another world, another kingdom. If you will listen slowly.”

A second reason for coming to church is to hear a different message about how to live in this crazy world. Elie Wiesel tells the story of a prophet who came to a city and delivered his message every day in the marketplace. After a time his ranting became a fixture of the city's life and people regarded him with amusement when they regarded him at all. Finally, a small boy, pitying the old man, approached him and said, **“Sir, why do you keep crying aloud like this every day, year after year? The people here will never listen to you.”**

“I gave up hope that they would listen to me a long time ago,” said the prophet. **“I go on crying lest I begin to listen to them.”**

Our craziness along with an underlying premise of addiction is that you and I should never be satisfied... it's un-American. We always need more and bigger and better and younger and thinner and with more hair or larger breasts. Church is a place where you hear, **“You are enough... you are a beautiful gift from God. Stop your craziness, slow down and listen to the voice within you that calms the moments and loves the self.”**

Third, why you need to come to this church is to hear an understanding about diversity. Our world is filled with everyone shouting that his or her way is the only way. What you and I need to hear is that any way is better than the old way of addiction and shame. Sitting and meditating with a mantra is wonderful. Holding onto a pouch of tobacco and giving mother earth a warm handclasp is calming. Saying the rosary may bring you back to the Mary of your youth with a peaceful feeling. We need to hear the words **“Come to God with your own spirit, in your own way, with church that gives a blessing.”**

A few years ago we had a young couple who came each week and walked up to communion and took the elements and kneeled at the communion rail. They did this week after week. I was amazed because you see they were Jewish and I knew that they still practiced some of the Jewish faith. So, I asked them what went on in their minds as they partook of the sacraments each week. They both agreed, that it was a spiritual moment and one in which they could take the elements and believe as they wished and be one with the same God as everyone else. I liked that!

And finally, and most importantly, we need a place to come each week where we don't take ourselves so damned seriously. Friends, we need to lighten up. I recently tried to get a meeting with a friend of mine and we struggled in settling a date and time. Eventually, I told him that we weren't that important to have this much stuff going on.

When will we lighten up on ourselves and have a giggle or a belly laugh. Where, if not here, can we come each week and see friends, learn something, slow down and celebrate the God of our understanding and chuckle at our own stupidity.

One last story of a man who I wished was a member of this congregation who didn't take himself so seriously and had a plan on how to have a face that glowed. It is a true story of a 33-year-old truck driver by the name of Larry Walters who was sitting in his lawn chair in his backyard one-day wishing he could fly. For as long as he could remember he had wanted to fly but he had 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 a lot of summer afternoons sitting in his backyard in his ordinary old aluminum chair - the kind with the webbing and the rivets, the kind most of us have. One day Larry hooked 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons 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 lawn chair expecting to climb a couple of 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.”**

Peter, James, and John might answer the same. Were you scared? **“Yes... wonderfully so.”**

All this “mountain” talk puts me in mind of Martin Luther King's last sermon. He delivered it April 3, 1968, on the eve of his assassination, at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, the headquarters of the Church of God in Christ, the largest African American Pentecostal denomination in the United States. He concluded his remarks that night:

“I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

Amen.