



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“The Power of Vision” – Matthew 17:1-9; Acts 9:1-22** **The Lord’s Supper** **Church Family Meeting**

Today is our Church Family Meeting, after worship. Your leaders are eager to share with you what God has been showing us about our church’s mission—what we have been calling “Act Two”. We are serving out goodies indoors today, so that everything is convenient for you. You can grab a snack and beverage, and stretch, then come back to your seat and we can begin and end early. I think you’ll want to be here for this.

To prepare us, I’ve chosen two portions of scripture that speak about vision: the Transfiguration text from Matthew, and Paul’s conversion. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 17. Matthew is the first book in our New Testament of the Bible. Find chapter 17, and listen for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

What must these three men of Jesus’ inner circle think about what they have seen? It was without precedent; they had never seen anything like it. Was it a vision, a dream (these guys did sleep a lot)--or was it real and corporal? Clearly, God was doing something. Jesus’ clothes, bright as the sun. Two men with him—Moses, and Elijah, as if God’s whole history with their people was personified in front of them, as these two spoke with Jesus, perhaps encouraging him for the terrible trial looming large, as he was setting his face to go to Jerusalem. God had peeled back the curtain on eternity, and given these three disciples a peek.

Then a cloud overshadowed them all, and God’s voice announced his pleasure in Jesus, His Son. God announced Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s plan for Israel and the world from the beginning; this was God’s son and humanity’s teacher. “Listen to him!” God had said. Apparently they had not been listening all that well, so far.

Then, coming down the mountain, Jesus tells them not to speak about this, until after the son had been raised. Why would he say that? Because, first, they probably didn’t get it. Peter’s offer to make three booths for these holy men was on his mind because it was near the time of the Feast of Booths, when people built little shelters out of sticks in imitation of how they watched in their fields as the first harvest was ripening, lest someone steal the crops. It reminded them of God’s watching over them, and of the bounty of the land as a gift from God. But Peter’s offer had no connection with this miraculous vision God had given them. So Jesus told them to keep this vision to themselves. They hadn’t been listening all that well, and they didn’t get it about Him.

And another reason for ordering their silence—if word got out about such a vision, the religious authorities would be on Jesus like flies on fresh meat. Remember, in Genesis, how young Joseph was given dreams by God, with symbolism that showed his older brothers bowing to him? Joseph told his brothers all about it. Do you remember what the brothers thought and did about his dreams? . . .

No, this was not the time for these three disciples to spread this visionary moment about Jesus around. Keep it quiet. After Jesus had been raised from the dead, and after the Holy Spirit had been given to the disciples, only THEN would they understand. For now, it was time to obey: “LISTEN to him!”

Turn now to the Luke’s account of Saul’s conversion, found in his book we call Acts, chapter 9. “Acts” is four more books into the New Testament from Matthew. Find chapter 9. Listen again for the Word of God. [text Acts 9:1-22]

What a complete reversal! Saul was confronted by the Lord Jesus, in a light as bright as what the disciples had seen on the mountain. He was blinded by the light—the man who thought he saw everything so clearly. Saul today would be called an “extremist”; he would say he was dedicated to God from his head down to his sandals. Saul had a vision for his life—purifying the Jewish faith by cleansing it of people who followed the Way of Jesus. It was a great vision, a compelling vision. It was the wrong vision. Saul had to be made blind, before he could see. He had to have the blackboard of his mind scrubbed clean, so that God could write a new thing, through trembling Ananias and the brothers and sisters of the churches in Damascus.

God wanted this dedicated man to get on the right track. I think it would be fair to say that this encounter on the road to Damascus changed human history in time, as much as Jesus changed human history for eternity.

Do we at Auburn Presbyterian Church see what God wants us to see? Do we have God’s vision? Do we have God’s power to move into that vision? Are we close enough to God to hear the Lord’s voice, to learn from our Teacher so that we live on his mission with him?

The prophet Joel spoke for God when he said, ““And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. . . .” (Joel 2:28, NIV) Peter picked up this Old Testament text when he preached the first Christian sermon on Pentecost Day. The Holy Spirit helped this bumbling disciples “get it” about Jesus. Now they saw clearly, they had God’s vision, what had been God’s purpose behind it all--and they wanted to cure everyone’s blindness about Jesus. They so eagerly wanted to carry out Jesus’ last commands in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 28—“Go, make disciples, baptize and teach the disciples to obey my commands”--that they couldn’t hide any longer. The Holy Spirit lit a fire under them—that’s why the Spirit is often pictured as flame or fire—and they couldn’t hold back. The Holy Spirit overcame their fear.

Jesus also said, in that same Matthew 28 passage, “And know that I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Jesus is with us--as we do what he tells us. Don’t feel like Jesus is with you? OK, when was the last time you did what he told you? You see, Jesus is not just a coping mechanism to help us bear up in the stresses of life as we live it on our own. (Aren’t so many of our prayers, “Help me, Jesus, do what I want to do: pay MY mortgage, heal MY husband, help ME pass this test?”) Yes, God does stoop to our needs; they are not irrelevant. But the Head of the Church is on mission, too; and those who follow him—not just believe in him—are on mission, too—*with him, and HE with us*.

Many of you know our congregation’s history. We started as a Bible study group meeting in the conference room of the school district building, just over there. We grew and chartered and moved around to larger quarters, and then built this building on our land. We all

had a general picture of what “starting a church” should look like, and we had done it! I have called that starting a church phase, “Act One”.

For some years, now, we have been asking God what “Act Two” should look like. We had some early ideas, like, If “Act One” had been mostly about us and “our” church, then Act Two would have to be mostly about “them”—people not here yet, people not connected with Jesus or Jesus’ church.

One change we have already made is in our structure--as you, the congregation, approved last spring. We’ll talk about that specifically in our meeting. (We’ll start our Church Family Meeting with this cool video Preston and I got at the national Leadership Summit this summer.)

Our Elders, Deacons, and Ministry Team Leaders took time to meet together away from this campus a few weeks ago. We had been praying hard, listening to God about what shape our new Act Two should take. And that’s the heart of what we want to share with you this morning. We are PUMPED! We think we know how God wants to fulfill the Act Two Vision he has given us: *“to passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ, and radiate that love to every individual”*. Say that with me: *to passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ, and radiate that love to every individual.*”

Now, you may be listening to God, too. We hope you do. You may have another word from our Lord that our leaders need to hear. Please do not be shy about it. With your input, we will ask God, and if God guides us that way, we will tweak how we implement the vision God has given us.

Listen to God. Wow, I talk about that a lot. Is that working for you? Do you believe God really wants to connect with you today? This week? If you don’t believe it, you won’t see it; you’ll miss the ways God is reaching out to you and me. Please give God the time God wants; wait on Him, as Scripture says.

Carl Sandburg wrote, “Nothing happens unless first a dream.” Get your goodies inside today, and return to your seats after about 10 minutes of saying “hi” to each others. We think we have God’s dream to share!

### **Communion Introduction**

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on November 4, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]