

# “I Stood in my Shoes and I Wondered”

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Guest Speaker: John Carlson

Third Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2017

## Scripture:

John 3:1-17

## Sermon:

The English romantic poet, John Keats, penned a cute one:

### *There was a Naughty Boy*

There was a naughty boy,  
A naughty boy was he,  
He would not stop at home,  
He could not quiet be-  
He took  
In his knapsack  
A book  
Full of vowels  
And a shirt  
With some towels,  
A slight cap  
For night cap,  
A hair brush,  
Comb ditto,  
New stockings-  
For old ones  
Would split O!  
This knapsack  
Tight at his back  
He riveted close  
And followed his nose  
To the North,  
To the North,  
And followed his nose  
To the North.

There was a naughty boy,  
And a naughty boy was he,  
He ran away to Scotland  
The people for to see-  
There he found  
That the ground  
Was as hard,  
That a yard  
Was as long,  
That a song  
Was as merry,  
That a cherry  
Was as red-  
That lead  
Was as weighty  
That fourscore  
Was as eighty,  
That a door  
Was as wooden  
As in England-  
So he stood in his shoes  
And he wondered,  
He wondered,  
He stood in his shoes  
And he wondered.

This season of Lent, we are being reminded of the expansive thoughtfulness of faith outside of just the cross and resurrection. John 3:16 is an example. The verse is often quoted as support for an unqualified belief in the death of Jesus on the cross as the price paid for our sins so we can get into heaven. But I believe that to be an incredibly over-simplification and thus amazingly misleading theology.

That text is in context. It actually makes no reference to the death and resurrection. It is in the context of an account of Nicodemus, a Jew, a Pharisee, and a man who apparently had done a lot of wondering. Maybe he stood in his shoes and wondered. His curiosity got the best of him. And I give him great credit. He went straight to Jesus. Granted, it was in the middle of the night so no one else would wonder. But the conversation took a surprising turn for the learned scholar. Jesus suggested that even as a known teacher, he did not understand the core dimension of faith: you must be born of the spirit. You must be transformed in your heart and soul. The story doesn't really say, but apparently the conversation with Jesus left Nic standing in his shoes and still wondering.

I am reminded of other accounts of wondering. There was a time for Moses, shared in Exodus 3, where he was tending a flock in the wilderness and came on that burning bush that didn't burn up and definitely got him wondering. Yahweh spoke to him. And suggested he should even take off the shoes he was standing in, because he was encountering a holy moment.

I have an amazing personal story. Many years ago, our family was on a drive through RMNP. A wonderful Saturday afternoon, about 4 pm, when one of those fast little storms came crashing over the hill. Lightning, wind, thunder. Suddenly a small scrub tree right in front of us was struck by a bolt of lightning, The bush was immediately set to flame. I remembered Moses. I got out of the car and just stood there watching this tree burn in the middle of the meadow. I stood there in my shoes and I wondered.

There was a time for Joshua, reported in Joshua 5.

13. Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" 15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. Joshua in that moment of wonder was invited into the holy place of spiritual presence.

And there was a time of wondering for Jesus. Told in Luke 19, Jesus came near the city of Jerusalem and stopped. Looked over the city and wept, saying: "would that you knew the things that make for peace!" And maybe he stood in his sandals and wondered. When will they learn? When will they see?

Wondering invites us to the edge of curiosity. Taking off our shoes makes us vulnerable. We can step barefoot onto the soil of our very creation. When we accept we don't know and we seek with our deepest curiosity, we become open to new revelation. As long as we think we have the answer, we think we know, we are closed. When we wonder, we give up knowing we have the answer. We are invited into radical amazement.

Larry Walters is among the relatively few who have actually turned their dreams into reality. His story is true, even though you may find it hard to believe.

Larry was a truck driver, but his lifelong dream was to fly. When he graduated from high school, he joined the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, poor eyesight disqualified him. So, when he finally left the service, he had to satisfy himself with watching others fly the fighter jets that criss-crossed the skies over his backyard. As he sat there in his lawn chair, he dreamed about the magic of flying.

Then one day, Larry Walters got an idea. He went down to the local Army-Navy surplus store and bought a tank of helium and forty-five weather balloons. These were not your brightly colored party balloons, these were heavy-duty spheres measuring more than four feet across when fully inflated. Back in his yard, Larry used straps to attach the balloons to his lawn chair, the kind you might have in your own back yard.

He anchored the chair to the bumper of his jeep and inflated the balloons with helium. Then he packed some sandwiches and drinks and loaded a BB gun, figuring he could pop a few of those balloons when it was time to return to earth.

His preparations complete, Larry Walters sat in his chair and cut the anchoring cord. His plan was to lazily float up a ways, and then lazily back down to terra firma. But, things didn't quite work out that way.

When Larry cut the cord, he didn't float lazily up - he shot up as if fired from a cannon! Nor did he go up a couple hundred feet. He climbed and climbed, until he finally leveled off at eleven THOUSAND feet! At that height, he could hardly risk deflating any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really experience flying! So, he stayed up there, sailing around for fourteen hours, totally at a loss as to how to get down. Eventually, Larry drifted into the approach corridor for Los Angeles International Airport. A Pan Am pilot radioed the tower about passing a guy in a lawn chair at eleven thousand feet... with a gun in his lap. (Now there's a conversation I would have liked to have heard!)

LAX is right on the ocean, and you may know that at nightfall, the winds on the coast begin to change. So, as dusk fell, Larry began drifting out to sea.

At that point, the Navy dispatched a helicopter to rescue him. But, the rescue team had a hard time getting to him, because the draft from their propeller kept pushing his home-made contraption farther and farther away. Eventually they were able to hover over him and drop a rescue line with which they gradually hauled him back to earth.

As soon as Larry hit the ground, he was arrested.

But as he was being led away in handcuffs, a television reporter called out to ask, "Mr. Walters, why did you do it?"

Larry stopped, eyed the man for a moment and replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around."

Filled with wonder and inspiration, people often do most amazing things. One story is the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. The bridge that spans the river tying Manhattan Island to Brooklyn is truly a miracle bridge. In 1863, a creative engineer named John Roebling was inspired by an idea for this spectacular bridge. However, bridge-building experts throughout the world told him to forget it; it could not be done.

Roebling convinced his son, Washington, who was a young up and coming engineer, that the bridge could be built. The two of them developed the concepts of how it could be accomplished and how the obstacles could be overcome. With unharnessed excitement and inspiration, they hired their crew and began to build their dream bridge.

The project was only a few months under construction when a tragic accident on the site took the life of John Roebling and severely injured his son, Washington. Washington was left with permanent brain damage and was unable to talk or walk. Everyone felt that the project would have to be scrapped since the Roeblings were the only ones who knew how the bridge could be built.

Even though Washington was unable to move or talk, his mind was as sharp as ever, and he still had a burning desire to complete the bridge. An idea hit him as he lay in his hospital bed, and he developed a code for communication. All he could move was one finger, so he touched the arm of his wife with that finger, tapping out the code to communicate to her what to tell the engineers who were building the bridge.

For thirteen years, Washington tapped out his instructions with his finger until the spectacular Brooklyn Bridge was finally completed. The famous Barnum circus director once took 14 elephants over the bridge to demonstrate its strength. Standing on that bridge today is an experience of wonder, even if you don't know the story of its construction.

When we wonder, we leave our comfort zone. We are open to new possibility, new ways of perception, maybe even transformation.

Thinker and author, Sam Keen, suggests three types of wonder: Sensational wonder, ontological wonder, and mundane wonder. Keen suggests entering into a state of wonder is essential to approach full appreciation of our human experience. Wondering is not asking why? There is no why. We are. Yahweh said, I am who I am. I am sent you. Wonder is a place beyond words.

Guy in pet store. Saw a parrot. Was taking it in. Just watching in amazement of the creature – for the longest time in total silence. Finally the parrot said: Can't you talk?

Wonder is a place. A place of centering in awe. A place to camp your mind.

Army private, after training in maneuvers, was taken to the field. After looking around, he asked his Sargent: "So where is my foxhole?" Sargent replied: "You are standing in it. All you have to do is remove the dirt."

To enter into my own mystery, my connection with my creator? I am standing there. All I have to do is remove the dirt. Remove what is blocking my senses, my oneness. Be open to the mystery of my life and breath.

Unless a grain of wheat dies, it remains only a grain of wheat. And I wonder where in my soul I can die so I can know better the mystery of it.

We are challenged this morning to step out of our comfort zone and wonder. Get a little naughty if necessary. Stand in our shoes and wonder! And allow ourselves to be transformed.

I shall close with these amazing thoughts from Proverbs 8: 22-31

22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.

23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.

25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—

26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,  
or the world's first bits of soil.

27 When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

28 when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,

29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,

so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.

And I stood in my shoes and I wondered!