

Sermon for the Feast of the Transfiguration

(Exodus 24:12–18; 2 Peter 1:16–21; Matthew 17:1–9)

There is something about mountaintops, isn't there? High above the noise of the world, closer to the sky, standing where the air is thinner and the distance between heaven and earth feels smaller. It is no wonder that scripture is full of mountaintop moments—divine encounters where the veil is lifted, and for a moment, the truth of God's presence is revealed in ways so bright, so weighty, that human beings can scarcely endure them.

We see it in today's reading from Exodus. Moses is called up the mountain by God himself: *"Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there."* He enters the cloud of glory that settles on Mount Sinai like a consuming fire. For six days the cloud covers the mountain, and on the seventh day God speaks. Moses disappears into the cloud for forty days and forty nights, enveloped by the holiness of God. This is not a gentle, comfortable moment. It is overwhelming, awe-filled, dangerous even. Glory revealed. Heaven touching earth.

And we see it again on another mountain. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. And there, before their eyes, he is transfigured. His face shines like the sun. His clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear, speaking with him. Law and prophets, past and promise, gathered around the one who fulfills them all. Once again, the cloud descends. Once again, God speaks from within it: *"This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him."*

The disciples fall to the ground, overcome with fear. This is not a moment they control or manage. This is not spiritual inspiration or religious sentiment. This is the living God revealing himself, and it is more than human senses can comfortably hold.

And Peter—God bless Peter—does what we so often do when confronted by holiness. He wants to manage it. To preserve it. To build something solid around it. *"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings."* Let's capture the moment. Let's make it last. Let's stay on the mountain.

But the cloud interrupts him. The voice of God silences him. And when the cloud lifts, Moses and Elijah are gone. Only Jesus remains. And Jesus touches them and says, *"Get up, and do not be afraid."* Then they come down the mountain, carrying a vision they do not yet understand.

Seeing and Trusting the Witness

The letter we heard from 2 Peter insists that this was no illusion. *"We did not follow cleverly devised myths,"* the writer says, *"but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty."* The Transfiguration is not a metaphor. It is testimony. It is memory. It is witness to glory that was seen and heard and received.

And yet, Peter goes on to say something striking. Even this overwhelming experience does not stand alone. Alongside it stands *"the prophetic word made more sure."* Scripture. Promise. God's word, given again and again, like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.

Mountaintop moments matter. But they are not the whole story. They are given not so that we can remain in them, but so that we can trust God when we descend into the valley.

The Glory That Sends Us Down the Mountain

The disciples do not stay in the light. Jesus leads them down the mountain and sets his face toward Jerusalem. Toward misunderstanding. Toward suffering. Toward the cross. The glory revealed on the mountain does not cancel the pain that lies ahead; it prepares them for it.

Because the deepest truth of the Transfiguration is this: the dazzling light of Christ and the shadow of the cross belong together. The voice that says, "*This is my Son*" will not be silenced by suffering. The glory glimpsed in brightness will be fulfilled in self-giving love.

We are not meant to cling to the mountain. We are meant to listen to him.

What It Means for Us

We too are people who long for clarity, for moments when God feels close and radiant and unmistakable. And sometimes, by grace, we are given them. But faith is not built on managing glory. It is built on trust—on listening to the Son whom God has revealed.

The light of Christ is not given to blind us or to trap us in nostalgia. It is given to guide us. Like a lamp shining in a dark place. Like a promise that holds, even when the cloud descends.

And so we walk on. We carry the memory of glory into ordinary days. We listen for Christ's voice in scripture, in prayer, in the cries of the world. We trust that the same Jesus who shone on the mountain walks with us on the road.

One day, scripture promises, the veil will be gone forever. One day, the light will no longer frighten us, and we shall see him as he is. But for now, we listen. We follow. We descend the mountain with faith, knowing that the glory we have glimpsed is real, enduring, and already at work among us.

So take heart. The cloud has spoken. The Son has been revealed. And the light that shone on the mountain still shines—calling us forward, step by step, into the life of God.

Amen