

**“The Light that Leads Us Onward”**  
**by Rev. David J. Wood**  
**Transfiguration Sunday: February 15, 2026**  
**First Congregational Church Camden, Maine**

**II Peter 1: 16-19**

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. ’We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

**Matthew 17: 1-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’

When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid. ’And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

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This is Transfiguration Sunday the season finale of Epiphany Season...

Mountains matter in the Biblical story.

Things happen on mountains.

God makes appearances on mountains.

The story more often than not peaks on mountaintops.

Perhaps the most important mountain event in the Old Testament happens on Mt. Sinai...when Moses meet God face to face and receives the Ten Commandments.

Jennifer and I had the opportunity to visit Mt. Sinai back in the late 1990's.  
I remember it so clearly.  
We spent the night at hostel at the foot of Mt. Sinai.  
Just outside the walls of St. Catherine's Monastery.

We arose about 3:00 a.m., mounted our camels and, in the dark of night,  
made our way up the mountainside of Sinai. The goal, of course, was to make it to the  
peak in time to see the sun rise – to have the light dawn upon us on that Holy  
Mountain.

We made a few minutes before sunrise. However, I was over at the Bedouin tent,  
buying some hot chocolate and cookies at the moment the light dawned!

So much for my Epiphany!

According to tradition, Mt. Tabor is the site of The Transfiguration.  
Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. And there he is transfigured  
before them, "his face shone like the sun"

I can't explain it...that's above my pay grade.  
But I take it face value...as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke...  
And referred to in the text from II Peter...There Peter admonishes us....  
*to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place,  
until the day dawns  
and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

In the Eastern Church, the miracle that was the Transfiguration was NOT understood as  
something that happened to Jesus... the miracle of the Transfiguration was what  
happened in the Disciples...Namely, their eyes were opened. and they beheld Jesus as  
he truly was. What they witnessed was not the suspension of reality, but its full,  
unfiltered exposure.

A monumental moment worthy of a monument.  
Three monuments, actually as far as Peter was concerned.

Peter does not want it to be lost with the passage of time: building monuments to mark  
monumental moments was a well documented Jewish practice,  
Peter suggests three such monuments be constructed:  
one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus.

Let's be honest, who among us would not have been on board with Peter's proposal?

Who among us cannot stop ourselves from reaching for our phones whenever we see anything or anyone doing something that we don't want to forget or we want others to see...or at least we want others to see us seeing it.

Being in the moment is not enough...we want to capture and store it to guarantee its availability to us at will. We store up experiences in our effort to keep from forgetting them...only to forget where we stored them or how to retrieve them.

The truth is, if the moment does not live in us,  
no stored image will make it live again.  
but these high moments don't keep that way...  
we don't keep them...they keep us.

Nothing more depressing than to see people gathered in the moment of transcendence with cell phones held aloft in front of their faces. Being there, in the moment, is not enough...de-face the moment...

In a "put your phones away moment" the voice from heaven shuts Peter down...they would not be allowed to stay there...to locate faith in its fullness there...in that place.

For centuries...Sites were hard to find....lives in encounter....living relationship...

Interestingly, Peter's proposal is overruled...literally overshadowed by a cloud and a voice from heaven:

"This is my Son, the Chosen, Listen to him!"

At the center of the faith that is Christian is the demand that we listen to Jesus...the demand that, above all things, we cultivate a listening heart.

Let's be honest, listening is tenuous, is not easy...especially to Jesus.  
Monuments feel a lot more tangible, concrete, permanent, and reliable...controllable...

There is a Christianity afoot in this country that claims to follow Jesus but has ceased to listen to him. It has opted for the building of monuments and fortresses and walls.

It has decided that now is a time for waiting is over...it is time to take control, time for seizing power in the name of Jesus...that time for listening has passed.

**Who can blame them?**

**Who knows where listening to Jesus might take us?**

Jesus would lead them down from that mountain, move them on eventually to another mountain...equally monumental...and revealing..but in a completely different way....

Jesus was already envisioning another mountain...in the verses that preceded the passage we read today, Jesus had begun to tell them that he was destined for suffering and even death...and that they would have to prepare for the same.

It is the place we would come to call Golgotha...the place of Crucifixion of Jesus....

The contrast between the two moments, the two mountains could not be more striking...both mountains would be remembered by the disciples...equally revealing of who Jesus was.

There there would be no unapproachable light...  
only an impenetrable darkness

There would be no place for three monuments,  
but 3 crosses would stand..

no prophets of the likes of Moses and Elijah to be seen at Jesus side...  
just two anonymous thieves

no dazzling robe...  
only a naked body stripped of every shred of dignity and honor.

there would be no assuring voice from heaven, "This is my son..."

There would only a human solitary cry of abandonment..."My God, my God why have you forsaken me"

Herein lies the mystery of the ages:

On both of those mountains the nature of God and of God's undying love and mercy for this world was revealed...

To listen to Jesus is to allow ourselves to be thrown forward into the midst of life and death and everywhere in-between...to not cease from our listening and following...and in all our listening and following to not lose heart or hope.

If all we had was the one mountain, Mt Tabor...the mount of Transfiguration...following Jesus would come with the guarantee of comfort, resolution, transcendence...one that makes all things bright and clears up all the ambiguity and messiness and struggle that is our human circumstance!

If all we had was the mount we call Golgotha, we would have nothing more to tell than

the a tragic story of heroic martyrdom. The full truth of Jesus can only be comprehended when both of these mountains are before us...

There are, to be sure, glimpses, sometimes even flashes of unambiguous clarity and meaning, along the way. But there are moments, even monumental moments, that point up and to the mystery and wonder of it all.

**The wisdom of the church in the placing of Transfiguration in juxtaposition to Ash Wednesday...we must move on from the heights of glory and make our way into the valley of the shadow of death....and we begin the journey toward Easter....**

We begin with what is beyond doubt...in order to prepare us to be grasped by what is beyond belief. It's an amazing journey we are on together.

I had been at my new congregation for just a few months, and one of my members was not exactly taking to my preaching. "I'm not sure this church is a fit for me anymore."

She elaborated, "When I joined here several years ago, before you came, I joined because it felt like a place where I could find casual religion. Every week I could count on a pep talk that would get me up and going for a new week. Now I feel like every time I come here, I need to do something, be something, change something."

Of course, I took it all quite casually.

I've never forgotten that turn of phrase, "casual religion."

It screams, "banal, boring, and beside the point."

Incarnation...Transfiguration....Crucifixion...Resurrection....casual stuff, to be sure.

Our life here together is many things...hopefully not casual...but it is first and foremost the experience of being moved on together in faith hope and love...with glimpses of glory along the way, experiences of transcendence amidst the dailiness, sometimes the darkness...and in the many many countless moments in-between.

I am always amazed at the stories I hear from people who have had visions of God and who seem to live with an undiminished sense that God is near...I believe them. I have no doubt that my perception of reality is all its fullness is exceedingly poor...

But I don't find such stories nearly as important to my own understanding of faith than the stories of fellow pilgrims who are making their way through the darkness, the absence, and the silence...and have come to know the nearness of God there.

I remember a time in my own life when I felt somewhat lost. In the margins of my

Bible, in a Psalm I had read that day, I wrote:  
"Lord, help me to remember in the dark  
what I learned in the light.  
And, Help me to remember in the light,  
what I learned in the darkness."

In this Lenten season that lies before us,  
Let us pray...for the  
Eyes to see  
Ears to hear  
And the courage to follow.  
until, as St. Peter admonishes, "the day dawns  
and the morning star rises in your hearts." Amen.