

Last Sunday in Epiphany – Year A – February 15th, 2026

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

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The Light for the Road: From Mountaintop Glory to Everyday Faithfulness

I'm an orderly person, for the most part. Some of that comes with my job, which is leading people, managing projects, solving problems. I oversee technology operations at Cal Poly, which means the teams I lead support most of the computing technology that faculty, staff, and students use every day there. I'm good at handling crises, at figuring things out quickly, at "managing situations." There's a certain part of my brain that automatically says, in any given situation, "what's going on here, what's the problem, and how might we address, fix, or improve it." I'm imagining many of us here are good at that kind of thinking, at "managing," at that way of interacting with the world.

And I want to say clearly, that way of being is not a bad thing. It can be a gift. It can be how we care for one another. It can be how we keep people safe. It can be how we respond when something is broken.

But that way of relating to the world only takes us so far. Sometimes it takes us out of experiencing and appreciating the present moment into planning for the future. It keeps us in our heads. And if we seek to experience God more directly, not just as an idea, but as a lived reality, we need more than our instinct to manage. We need a different way of seeing and knowing. We need to pay attention. We need to learn to listen.

I have had a small number of profound and impactful spiritual and mystical experiences in my life. In 2000 I attended a conference called "Witness Our Welcome," which was a gathering of LGBTQ+ welcoming folks from across many denominations. I had just returned to the dormitory room where I was staying. I don't remember praying or doing anything specific, but suddenly I felt what I can only describe as the presence of God in the room with me. Everything became very still and I experienced, for the first time in my life, the understanding that God wasn't just an idea, but a presence, and a personal one, a presence that knew me intimately and loved me as a parent loves a child. Although the experience did not last for very long, it was a profound moment for me of healing and personal revelation, and a memory that I continue to draw upon to this day.

We hear in today's readings two accounts of divine presence and revelation that are cornerstones in our tradition: first, the story from Exodus of Moses ascending Mount Sinai, which was covered with the "glory of the Lord" to receive the tablets of the Law, and second, the story of Jesus, who leads Peter, James, and John to a high mountain place, and Jesus is transfigured—transformed—into a shining luminous being.

In the Exodus story, God's glory descends on the mountain with cloud and like "a devouring fire," and Moses disappears into the cloud for forty days and nights. The moment is mysterious, as if the boundary between heaven and earth became thin. Moses is called up by God not simply to have an individual experience, but to receive what Israel will need for the life of the covenant, to in fact become a new people. The story is both comforting and awe-inspiring: God comes near, and that nearness is overwhelming. But the result is the creation of a new people, a people who will live differently because God has acted and spoken.

Like today's story from Exodus, Matthew's gospel tells us a story with a similar structure. Jesus leads Peter, James, and John:

"up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as bright as light. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him."

One can only imagine what the disciples must have felt in this moment: certainly awe, wonder, joy. Their Master is transformed in front of their eyes into a being of light, and then two other beings appear, which the disciples understand to be Moses and Elijah, talking to Jesus.

But then Peter, practical Peter, interjects with a very human response. He says,

"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

He doesn't just want to experience the moment, he wants to "manage it," to domesticate this moment of wonder and revelation and set up camp. I mean, it is only natural, right? When something truly good, or even something enjoyable or pleasurable happens, our instinct can be to say, "I don't want this good moment to end, how can I prolong it?"

And this is particularly understandable, given that in the previous chapter of Matthew, Jesus has just revealed that "he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised."

But then,

"while he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'"

Here is the turning point. Peter is still talking, still trying to *do something*, still trying to manage, and God interrupts him. Not to shame him, but to redirect him. Not "build something," but "listen." Not "preserve this moment," but "pay attention to my Son."

And at this point the disciples are overcome and fall to the ground, overcome by fear. And Jesus' response is simply to touch them, perhaps to reassure them he is still flesh and blood, and to tell them, "Get up and do not be afraid."

This is certainly a mountaintop experience. But it isn't *only* an experience, but also a commission. It is a reorientation. In Exodus, Moses enters the cloud to receive what Israel will need for the covenant. Here in Matthew, the cloud overshadows them and God names Jesus as Beloved and gives one clear instruction: *listen* to him.

This story also makes clear that we can not stay on the mountain, despite how good it can feel. The mountaintop prepares and enables us for what comes after. It changes the way we see and understand the world, so we can be prepared for what comes next.

That is why this Sunday sits where it does. There is great wisdom and beauty in the design of our liturgical cycle. During Epiphany, we see again and again the recognition of who Jesus is. The Magi recognize him as king. At the Jordan, and again today, God names Jesus as his Son, and Beloved. Jesus is light, figuratively and literally, for all the nations. Jesus calls his disciples with authority. He heals and restores. And Jesus' presence is transformative. It reorders reality.

And Psalm 2 reminds us that this is not only about a private spiritual moment. The world has its own demands. The nations rage. Powers plot. Other loyalties compete for our attention. Into that noise, God speaks a steady word about Jesus: this is my Son. Listen to him.

And Peter's letter tells us what to do with this kind of revelation. It insists that the apostles are not speaking from "cleverly devised myths (that is, stories they made up)," but as witnesses, and it compares this message about Jesus to a lamp shining in a dark place. That is, the light is real, and it is given for the road.

For the story doesn't end in Epiphany. And so, this week, we begin our descent from the mountaintop into the "downward way" of the season of Lent. The Transfiguration prepares us for Lent in at least three ways.

First, we must remember that Lent, and the story of Jesus' Passion, is not a detour from Jesus' glory. It is the path that glory takes. It is the way Jesus' identity is ultimately revealed, in weakness, suffering, and ultimately in resurrection.

Second, it changes our understanding of what "spiritual success" should look like. Peter wants to build booths to preserve the mountaintop experience, but faithfulness is practiced mostly off the mountain, in unseen acts of self-sacrifice, hard days, and ordinary love. Listening is not only something we do when the sky opens. Listening is what we practice when the road is long and nothing feels luminous.

And finally, today's story of light and glory gives us what we need for our journey into the shadow. The disciples didn't stay on the mountain. The vision of the Transfiguration is provision for the hard road

ahead. Lent often brings us into confrontation with mortality, complicity, and fear, but the Transfiguration says: you don't go there without a promise. The light you saw is real, and it will still be true even in the darkest of moments.

So, friends, let us rejoice in the Light, in the knowledge of who Jesus is: the Beloved in whom God is well pleased, the Light of all nations, the Son we are commanded to listen to. And as we go down from the mountain into Lent, let us resist the urge to "build booths and manage the moment". Instead, let us practice listening for and to Jesus. When we are frightened, may we remember Jesus' touch. And when the road narrows, may we remember his words: "Get up, and do not be afraid."

I thank You God

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?
(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

— e. e. cummings

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Thanks be to God.