

TIME TO GO

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February 15, 2026

Last Sunday of Epiphany - Transfiguration

Exodus 24:15-18

Then Moses went up to the mountain to where the engulfed it. The glory of [Adonai] then came to dwell on Mount Sinai. The cloud covered the mountain for six days; on the seventh day, God called to Moses out of the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of [Adonai] looked like an all-consuming fire at the top of the mountain. Moses climbed the mountain until he disappeared into the cloud, and stayed there for forty days and forty nights.

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain to be alone with them. And before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured - his face becoming as dazzling as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said, "Rabbi, how good that we are here! With your permission I will erect three shelters here - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!" Peter was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Out of the cloud came a voice which said, "This is my Own, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests. Listen to him!" When they heard this, the disciples fell forward on the ground, overcome with fear. Jesus came toward them and touched them, saying, "Get up! Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they did not see anyone but Jesus. As they were coming down the mountainside, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone about this until the Chosen One has risen from the dead."



A week earlier, a conversation between Simon and Jesus was still being whispered about around the campfire. Jesus had said, "Yes." Addressing the rumors, "Yes, people say that I'm a prophet, but who do you say that I am?" And it's Simon who blurts out, "You're the Messiah. the heir of the living God. And Jesus responds, "Okay, but don't tell anyone that I'm the Messiah." I wonder if Jesus sensed that this odd conversation left more than a few unresolved questions among the disciples. Maybe that's why according to the gospel texts that Jesus began teaching about ha-ben-adam, the son of dust, literally: often translated in English as the son of man. In places in the Hebrew Bible like Ezekiel, the phrase ben-adam literally means mortal, a human. In other places like the book of Daniel it seems to be taking on this otherworldly connotation. It's likely that Daniel like attention that Jesus is giving to ben-adam. This ben-adam is going to have to be rejected, Jesus taught,

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undergo suffering and be killed. That's the way it's recorded in the Gospel of Matthew which of our three first gospels is the oldest one and the version that Matthew and Luke started with and expanded upon. It's interesting that when Matthew, the same gospel we heard from today, takes that passage and the author just completely interprets ben-adam as being Jesus. In Matthew's gospel, if we'd read a few verses earlier than our passage today, we would have heard that *Jesus began to show his disciples that he must undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed*. It's during that time that Jesus also begins to say things like, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let them deny themselves and follow." And those who lose their life for my sake will find it. What will it profit someone if they gain the whole world and give up their life? I'm not sure that those additional teachings really cleared things up.

It was six days later, as our passage says today, that Jesus and the inner circle of his disciples hiked up a mountain together. Mountaintops are full of rich imagery within the Hebrew and the New Testaments. The Israelites of the Exodus camped at the foot of Mount Horeb in the Sinai Peninsula because it was believed to be their God's mountain home. Moses, Aaron, and a small select group of religious leaders were the only ones who could go up on the mountain. It was just too holy for just anyone. Mostly Moses went up alone. And he relayed messages to God and from God. It's in that time that Moses brings down ten commandments. Moses also speaks of other rules for religious practices, even expectations for how you should deal with tragic events. Like for example, it gives rules as to how to deal with something if a bull gores someone with their horns and how the rules might be different if this bull had done it before. There's rules about what happens if somebody falls into an open pit. Maybe the person who dug the pit has some responsibility. There are consequences for certain actions. If a master knocks out his slave's eye or tooth, then the slave gets to go free. Well, there's exceptions to that rule, too, because you know, you can't let all the slaves go free, right? And there were detailed directions for how to set up a worship tent and an altar in the wilderness. In fact, if you read the book of Exodus from chapter 19 on, it's mostly these instructions that Moses is bringing down to the people from being up on the mountain. One of those many mountain climbs, Moses caught a glimpse, just a glimpse, of God's back as God was moving by. And Moses didn't realize it at the time, but his face glowed after that. It shone enough so that it must have made people feel a little uncomfortable or maybe Moses was self-conscious, that most of the time he wore a veil over his face.

There's other memorable biblical mountains or hills. There's Mount Ararat in the Noah story where the ark finally comes to ground. The evidence that the flood is over. There's Mount Nebo where old Moses can see in the distance the land of Canaan at the end of the Exodus wandering. There's Mount Zion where King David built a new city and on the tallest part of that city placed the tabernacle tent from the Exodus where eventually Solomon would build a stone temple on that hill of Mount Zion. There's the wilderness mountain where Jesus is tempted with all of the glory of the powers of the earth. There's Jesus talking from a mountain side, sharing blessings, beatitudes, talking about salt and light. Those were our biblical passages over the last couple Sundays. There's the Mount of Olives where Jesus and his friends set up camp when they came to Jerusalem for the Passover. And then there's the Hill of the Skull, Golgtha, Calvary, a public execution site. And today's unnamed mountain.

Mountaintop experiences in the Bible tend to have three possible characteristics.

- They are places where you have a divine encounter literally like Moses did where you feel and you experience God in a tangible way. Maybe even conversations happen.
- It's a place that you might retreat to to find some alone time to be solitary, a time to reflect and think.
- And sometimes the mountains are a place where you get a wider perspective. Maybe literally like Moses on Mount Nebo looking over the land of Canaan. Or it could be a view of temptation or testing. like Jesus looking at all the powers of the world and being tempted with what it would mean to control

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that. Sometimes those hill experiences are times when we find something revealed because we're looking at things with a different perspective.

Simon and James and John and Jesus had bits of all three of those characteristics. the divine encounter, the retreat and the wider perspective when they had that mountaintop experience we read about today.

You heard the story... in a Moseslike change, Jesus' face shines. But more than Moses, Jesus' clothes also shine. Moses is the great liberator. And it's kind of a theme of the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus is at least as good as Moses and sometimes better. And there's the companions that appear who the disciples instinctively know are Moses and Elijah, the people most commonly associated with their tradition. Moses, the giver of the law. Elijah, a great prophet. This is the law and the prophets sitting with them. Jesus in the midst of their greatest traditions, the basis of their faith. And we heard that Simon briefly tries to freeze the moment. *I'll make tents for everyone*. And then a voice, a voice with the same message from Jesus' baptism. This is my own. This is my beloved. This is someone with whom I am well pleased. I have deep favor and support for this beloved one of my own. And then a new line that wasn't at the baptism. Listen to Jesus. And then like that it's over. No cloud, no glowing clothes, no glowing face, no Elijah, no Moses, no voice. And like six days or more earlier, Jesus tells them, "Don't say anything about this to anyone, at least yet." I'm presuming that Simon and James and John were fairly faithful to that expectation, but there's no way that the three of them didn't talk about it amongst themselves. You know, there are the rules of confidentiality. We're all at the same meeting.

We can talk. It's hard to see the clear evidence from that mountaintop experience that it flipped a switch necessarily for Simon, James, and John. But I think it's fair to say that it probably, at least for Simon, flipped a switch. In Matthew, much of what follows this experience are various teachings of Jesus. And Simon does ask questions here and there, but Simon doesn't have that confrontational attitude, arguing with Jesus like Simon did six days before the transfiguration. So I like to imagine that after coming down that mountain that Simon really started to live into the nickname that Jesus had given him. You are rock. You're Caphas, you're Petros, you're Peter, a rock. And I imagine Peter (in Peter's mind) thinking, I am especially motivated to be a committed follower of Jesus. Now, Simon Peter's human. We know that his commitment took a bit of a backseat to fear following Jesus' arrest. And maybe even after Jesus' resurrection, he was willing to just kind of, well, let's just go fishing. Let's go back to the old way of life. But more and more after they came down from that mountain, Peter was a rock in ways that Peter hadn't been before.

The Matthew story today is called the transfiguration. It was used in the passage itself because Jesus' appearance changes. It transfigures right in front Peter, James, and John. Now that change was very finite, barely momentary, but it was the disciples who seemed to have been opened up to lasting change. I like to hear this story as actually the disciples' transfiguration - that they were changed.

Every once in a while something happens that compels a person to say, "That's it. I have to do something. I'm not going to stay on the sidelines anymore. I am changing how I think about this and how I act about this."

Canadians of every stripe came together in grief and disbelief and care in the wake of last Tuesday's school shooting in Tumbler Ridge. It's virtually unanimous that people are feeling a common sense of sorrow. There are prayers from all circles for support and comfort for the families. But in some cases, those already existing anti-trans circles of the internet, those wannabe internet influencers, even one bigoted BC MLA could not help put the "but" on the statements of grief. In fact, they spent more time talking about a view they've espoused before and they exploited this tragedy to advance that same message. And like before, their rhetoric makes people who are just trying to live their authentic lives more uncomfortable, more worried, and less safe. more likely a target of someone's misplaced anger. I am confident though that there are not many, if any, new

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anti-trans voices. I was seeing the same regular people saying the same thing they've been saying before. And I've been seeing lots of people speak against it.

I've been one to share a different message in public and from this hallowed place. But I don't know if I have any more tolerance for the intolerant. I no longer need to tolerate a diversity of opinion because *everybody has a right to say what they want to say*. I no longer will accept that on an issue of human dignity and worth. I have been polite for too long. I need to change my own ignorance. And by saying that I mean my own willingness to ignore. Because to create circumstances of actual and potential harm to an already vulnerable part of our society and community is wrong. There is no *well we just have to agree to disagree*. It's wrong. No matter what demographic a particular shooter happens to fit into.

And so I will pray with and for the families of those innocents who were murdered in Tumbler Ridge. And I will pray with and for the innocents who are feeling blamed for this because they share something in common with the shooter. That's it. Going to be different.

Jesus' disciples likely respected Jesus' request to keep some of those discoveries under wraps for a while, but eventually the dam breaks of what they came to believe and they openly proclaimed and they lived into a ministry that called people to love God and to love others as oneself.

Now, each of us are going to have our own situations or experiences, and it's going to be different for each one of us. And most of us will have these transfiguration moments many times over the course of our lives where we cross a line and say, "I'm not going back". But eventually there is a time to leave the mystery and the insight of those mountaintops where we can reflect and where we can discern and get back into the valley where we have to take a stand. Where life is both beautiful and ugly. Where life is both easy and hard. where we are complex people in a complex world.

There comes a time to say: "let's go. Let's transfigure this world."

Amen.

#104VU We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding

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