

*Hope in a Fractured World*  
Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday Year A  
February 15, 2026  
For the Western North Dakota Synod of the ELCA  
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TEXT: Matthew 17:1-9

I like to watch movies—and I'm grateful for the multitude of options available to stream viewing so I can start watching whenever it works for me. I don't have to plan my evening around the TV's schedule. And most importantly, I don't have to miss the first seven and a half minutes while I'm trying to convince my husband to relinquish control of the remote...only to spend the rest of the movie trying to figure out an integral plot point.

Because if I'm going to watch a movie, I want to see the whole thing—start to finish. I want to know what's going on.

Which is why today's gospel reading feels like we walked into the theater way too late to make sense of what's happening. Last we were in Matthew 5 with Jesus calling us salt and light, building upon the Sermon on the Mount from the previous week when Jesus was teaching the crowds, blessing the poor in spirit and the persecuted. And suddenly today we're in Matthew 17, on a mountaintop, with Jesus shining like the sun, Moses and Elijah appearing out of nowhere, and Peter wanting to set up tents like he's organizing a church retreat.

It's jarring. It's disorienting. It feels like we missed something. There's no recap. Only Matthew beginning with "Six days later". Wait. Where's that backup button? Six days later than what?

Six days after Peter finally picked up the clue phone.

Jesus had asked, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter blurted out, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Finally. After all the miracles, all the healing, all the teachings, all the debates with religious leaders—finally it sinks in. Jesus isn't just a spectacular preacher or a gifted healer. He is the One. The Messiah. The Son of the living God!

And that is the moment that leads to today's story.

Because once the disciples know who Jesus is, Jesus shows them who he really is.

On that mountain, the veil is pulled back—you know—the curtain in the Temple that separated the people from God? That one. And the ordinary gives way to the extraordinary. Jesus shines with the very glory of God.

But let's back up and look at what's going on during those intervening 6 days.

Peter's words of proclamation and certainty that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah are hardly out his mouth when Jesus begins to tell the disciples about what is to come; that they will go to Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die. And be raised; whatever that means.

Ugh. It's not the news you want to hear in the midst of great joy and adulation—that your beloved leader is heading into a death trap and taking you with him.

So, I imagine those 6 days have been ones of great sadness and disbelief. Hearts are heavy among Jesus' followers. They are overwhelmed by all that is going on in the world around them and in their very own lives. It's scary stuff.

For these 3 there is a reprieve—a moment of respite away from the others, some much desired times with Jesus climbing a mountain. And before their very eyes, Jesus is transformed—he is changed into a dazzling presence.

Moses is the symbol of the Torah and the Mosaic Law given to Israel; the guidelines that God has established with God's people to shape and direct their relationship with one another, with foreigners and strangers and with their God. Elijah represents the prophetic tradition that called Israel to faithfulness and foretold the coming Redeemer.

Jesus stands with Moses and Elijah—these long-dead rock stars of the Jewish faith—revealing that in Christ the law and the prophets come together as the genesis of a new creation through the cross and the empty tomb.<sup>1</sup>

A cloud overshadows them, and a voice speaks: “This is my Son, the Beloved…listen to him!”

It is breathtaking. It is holy. And it is terrifying.

The disciples fall to the ground, overcome by fear. And honestly, who wouldn't?

I think many of us know something about fear these days. We live in a world that feels torn apart by division—political division, cultural division, even division within families and communities. We live in a world where violence, hatred, and uncertainty seem to be on the rise. We live in a world where many of us wake up wondering what new crisis will unfold today. And even when we try to stay hopeful, the weight of it all can feel like too much.

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<sup>1</sup> Rawle, Matthew, Rev. [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2004063/matt\\_rawle\\_wibblywobbly\\_timeywimey\\_transfiguration](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2004063/matt_rawle_wibblywobbly_timeywimey_transfiguration)

It's no wonder we feel overwhelmed. It's no wonder we sometimes want to hide our faces. It's no wonder we long for clarity, for reassurance, for something solid to hold onto.

And that is exactly what the Transfiguration gives us.

The Transfiguration speaks into our fractured world.

First, it tells us that Jesus is not fragile. He is not overwhelmed by the chaos that scares us. His light is not dimmed by the world's shadows.

Second, it tells us that we are not alone, Because when the disciples fall to the ground in fear, Jesus comes to them—not with judgement, not with impatience—but with a touch and a word”: “Get up and do not be afraid”.

Not because there is nothing frightening in the world. Not because faith magically removes hardship. Not because Christians are immune to anxiety or grief.

But because Jesus is with us,

The One whose face shines like the sun in the same One who reaches out with human hands. The One who stands with Moses and Elijah is the same One who walks with us into the messiness of our lives. The One who reveals divine glory is the same One who will soon reveal divine love on a cross.

Peter wants to stay on the mountain. Who can blame him? When the world below feels dangerous, we all want to cling to the mountaintop moments.

But Jesus leads them back down—not because the world is safe, but because the world is loved.

And that's the heart of it.

We are not people who escape the world. We are people who follow Jesus into the world—the same Jesus who shines with God’s glory and who also walks straight toward the cross. The Transfiguration sends us back into the world with hope.

When Peter, James and John come down the mountain, nothing about the world has changed. Rome is still oppressive. The religious leaders are still suspicious. The disciples are still confused. The cross is still ahead.

But they have changed. They have seen who Jesus is. They have heard the voice of God. They have been touched by grace.

And that gives them courage.

So yes. Today’s gospel may feel like we walked into the movie hallway through. But the plot is clear:

Jesus is God’s beloved. Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. Jesus is the One who meets us in our fear. Jesus is the One who walks with us into a divided and frightening world.

So, we go down the mountain with courage, carrying Christ’s light into a world that desperately needs it, knowing he goes before us and beside us every step of the way.

Amen.