

**Kirk of St James**  
**February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026**  
**"Mountaintops and Valleys Low"**  
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We likely all have moments in time that we would love to press pause on and live in forever. The movie, “Groundhog Day” was about having to relive the same day over and over again, and the main character becoming increasingly frustrated, because he does not want to experience that day on repeat. However, sometimes there are days we could simply live in forever. There have been significant moments in my life where I have an awareness of how special something is, yet there is nothing that can be done to eventually stop it from passing through my fingers. A perfect long summer day swimming and then sharing food with family, a vacation, milestones like a wedding, these are moments we would be happy to live in. However, the other side of that is there are moments we would not want to relive ever again. The loss of someone we love, or a beloved pet, a job that ended, a life changing doctors’ appointment.

That is part of the problem, for better or worse we simply have no control in these situations. Sometimes in life the cost of not having to feel pain almost feels worth it, the problem is in trying to isolate ourselves from grief or, disappointment means we also prevent joy. There are moments when I miss our children being babies and while it would be nice to go back to a time when they were not old enough to argue with, I would also miss them discovering what brings them joy. As one person said, “The wise way to prepare for joy or sorrow in this life is to take the road of the stoics of antiquity. Cut yourself off from emotion. Keep everyone and everything at a distance. Build a fortress around your soul. Do not risk the price of wonder or of heartache.” If we stay on the mountain we will not have to face the cross. However, as we prepare to enter the season of Lent this week Jesus reminds us that is not a practical or healthy way to live.

Today is transfiguration Sunday in the Church calendar year. In the book of Matthew, the author has been focusing on Jesus as the Messiah, a son of David, and of

Abraham. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and whose birth was proclaimed by the heavens. He is God's own Son as foretold by the prophets, who teaches by God's authority, and whose restorative powers transcends all else—disease, paralysis, sickness, demons, nature, and who can also forgive sins. As one author points out “at this point in Matthew's gospel, with the cross and the meaning of sonship coming into sharper relief, the transfiguration confirms Jesus' identity as the glorious Son of God Messiah. For the disciples who are present, it is also a sign of new life that awaits Jesus the faithful One beyond the cross, and signals new life for Jesus' followers as well.” The baby born in the manger, is so much more than they could have imagined.

So, on this day as our Bible reading tells us, Jesus, James, John, and Peter go up a high mountain. The disciples have just heard the news of Jesus' coming death. They have been told that a time is coming when he will no longer be among them. That would have been terrifying news for them. They could not believe it; they likely could not have imagined life without Jesus, who quite literally changed their lives, and their professions. So, when this moment arrives in Matthew, the disciples see an opportunity. They offer to make Jesus, Moses, and Elijah dwellings there on the mountain. Up there they would be away from the world where it is safe, and where they can always be with Christ. They want to stay on the mountain. It is hard to blame them. When we have a mountaintop experience like the disciples the temptation is to want to stay in that moment, to keep living the absolute joy. Yet time moves us on. Jesus knew they could not stay on the mountain.

That moment was bittersweet for the disciples. They have been following their teacher and have been learning from him. They still do not understand completely, but when he was transfigured, when God was speaking, they finally caught a glimpse of what Jesus was talking about it. They have come face to face with the divine. The problem is it cannot last. What they can see so clearly in this moment, will become clouded among the chaos and noise of the world. Despite this mountaintop moment Peter will deny Jesus three times. This experience for the disciples is much like the final

words C.S Lewis wrote in the book *Silver Chair* when Aslan (who represents a Christlike figure) says "Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear, and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not cloud your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearance. Remember the signs. Nothing else matters." This sums up beautifully what it means to leave the clarity of the mountaintop and enter back into the noise of the world.

For me, the most beautiful moment in the transfiguration story is that when it is over, and the disciples are walking home, Jesus is walking with them. Jesus does not stay on the mountain either. Even after he has been transfigured and knowing what will come--that in many ways this is beginning of his walk to the cross, he enters back into humanity anyway. He knows that is where life is lived, that is where the work must be done. While the mountaintop can be a breath of fresh air, or a moment of clarity, it is not where we stay--that being said, it has a purpose.

One author describes the transfiguration experience for the disciples this way, "The mountain was the way for God to prepare a human band of companions for the sacred journey, to offer something to hold onto when they descend back into the crushing reality of the world below...God does much the same for us today. We have our own mountaintop encounters it is true. But much more likely our encounters with the divine happen in ordinary moments." Sometimes the dangers of the mountain top as the disciples demonstrate is that when we experience it, we want to stay there to keep chasing those good feelings, to keep recreating those positive experiences. And suddenly we no longer want to come down the mountain, even though trying to stay is hurting us.

The challenge of the transfiguration is seeing the divine, the sacred, the light of Christ, in the everyday world around us. In the valleys if you will. Joy is not only found on the mountain. At the end of every week at Camp Geddie the staff used to sit together

to debrief the week and reflect on a question, "what was your God moment for the week?" Maybe a sunset, maybe a moment where your whole group was laughing around a campfire, maybe a breakthrough with a difficult camper. Life rushes past so quickly and sometimes it is hard to even lift our heads under the work and anxiety. When that happens, we miss the sacred, we miss the Holy. Perhaps that camp question is a not a bad question for us to ask of ourselves each week. What has been your God moment? Where have you encountered God this past week? It is not a question we tend to ask ourselves, and it reminds us that God is present and at work in the world. Maybe the answers will surprise us, maybe the answers will change us or even challenge us.

I want to close today with an excerpt from one of my commentaries that I thought was beautifully written it said, "God prepares people in the transcendent encounters of our lives to endure the world below, the world of the cross, the world that has the ability to break us and yet is never beyond God's redemption. These encounters happen on mountaintops with a blinding light for some. For most, they happen in the ordinary moments of our classrooms, boardrooms, and soup kitchens—any place where we make a space for the Holy to be present...The moment of transfiguration is that point at which God says to the world and to each of us that there is nothing we can do to prepare for or stand in the way of joy or sorrow. We cannot build God a safe monument, and we cannot keep God safe. We also cannot escape the light that God will shed on our path. We cannot escape God, Immanuel among us. God will find us in our homes and in our workplaces. God will find us when our hearts are broken and when we discover joy. God will find us when we run away from God and when we are sitting in the middle of what seems like hell. So "get up and do not be afraid."