

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. We awaken from the yawning summer heat, we break from the slower pace of longer days. We exchange our “ordinary-time” green altar linens for white. We stand alongside the disciples to witness the visible manifestation of God in Jesus Christ.

If you were here on February 19th, the last Sunday of Epiphany, you would have heard St. Matthew give this same account with almost the exact same details. Twice in the same year, the lectionary treats us to this beautiful story.

I invite you to spend a few moments imagining the scene on the mountain. If you're comfortable doing so, close your eyes. See yourself standing on the summit, peering out at brown vistas in the distance. Inhale the earthy scent of red dirt beneath your feet. Feel the hot wind on your face. And as you center yourself for a time of prayer, see the dazzling white light suddenly emanate from Jesus's very being.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels all recount the Transfiguration. And while some minor details vary, the essence of the story is the same: Jesus selects Peter, James, and John to accompany him up a mountain; Jesus's appearance is transformed, as the long-dead prophets Moses and Elijah show up; a bright cloud envelopes the confused disciples, as the voice of God instructs, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

Along with Jesus's baptism, which began his public ministry, the Transfiguration, which marks the end of his ministry, is a pivotal point in the Christian story. All our readings today tie to this event, from Moses' own visible transformation after meeting God on Mount Sinai, to the Psalm's reference to that conversation, to

Peter's Epistle account of Jesus's transformation, to the Gospel's portrayal of this surreal experience.

The thematic thread between readings is so strong, you could wrap it all together, stick a bow on it, and call it a day. But there's a lot we can unpack together this morning.

As a professional writer in my secular vocation, I'm keenly aware that the details *not* included in a story—the ones left to interpretation or imagination—are as important as the ones included.

For example, Mount Sinai in Egypt stands approximately 7,500 feet tall. The Transfiguration's exact location is up for debate. Mount Tabor in lower Galilee, at 2,000 feet high, is one option. Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights is another, at roughly 9,000 feet above sea level.

We know from earlier in Exodus that Moses went all the way to the top of Mount Sinai. And whatever the true location of the Transfiguration, we can assume the disciples ascended to a significant height in their journey. Maybe not all the way to the peak, but high enough to leave them exhausted, high enough to where clouds could overshadow them.

By contrast, consider that the Maryland Heights Trail of the Blue Ridge Mountain Range rises about 1,500 feet. Not long ago my husband and I hiked to the lookout approximately 1,200 feet up, from which you can survey the town of Harper's Ferry. I consider myself in decent shape, not an expert hiker but not a novice either. And I can tell you that I huffed my way up that trail, over rocks and fallen tree stumps, higher and higher, until I reached the overlook, sweaty and breathless.

So, I think it's safe to assume the disciples, just as Moses did some 1,600 years prior, would've endured a pretty challenging hike.

And here lies the story that isn't told: As the disciples made their way up the trail, I imagine the questioning, the grumbling, the doubts: *Why* must we go up this mountain? *Why* can't we have our time of prayer in the safety of the Upper Room? My legs hurt. I need water. I saw an animal lurking in the brush. *Why*, Lord, why?

All this would've taken place before the dramatic change to Jesus's appearance, before his clothes become "dazzling white" as the three chosen disciples witness the radiance of God's glory.

And then there's Peter, who responds to all this with a strange suggestion to set up three tents so they can all take a nice long rest. You have to love Peter, in all his human faults and failings, who often doesn't quite get it at first—but somehow ultimately rises to meet Jesus's expectations and fulfill his call.

For though his response seems odd, Peter does eventually "get it," recalling this event in the Epistle: "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"...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."

Peter expresses the disciples' experience when face to face with the reality of Jesus transformed, the appearance of Elijah and Moses setting this event within the context of the prophets, the age-old stories of deliverance, and God's promise to the people of Israel.

One might wonder if the disciples just happened to be in the right place at the right time as this occurred. But when they appear to miss the point initially, God makes sure they get the point—speaking to them directly from a cloud. And as witnesses to the Transfiguration, the disciples themselves are transformed. We know they go on to establish the Church, to teach and heal and minister, to spread the Gospel's message far and wide.

Do they realize how they've been changed? Maybe not at first. Maybe not at all. But how often do we miss, or misunderstand, moments of transformation in our own lives?

Sometimes, we get stuck along flat terrain, in the familiar rhythm of our daily lives: work, school, social time, caring for family. Other times we're swept up in the peaks: the joy of accomplishments and life celebrations. Still other times, we are weighed down by anxiety and isolation, by the sheer exertion of the climb.

Though we may not immediately recognize moments of transformation, one thing seems clear: the desire to see God seems a driving force in all created beings—whether we realize it or not. Some may consider it alignment with “The Universe.” Others seek some form of “self-actualization”—or the realization of their potential and purpose. Still others deny this desire and fill the void with unhealthy or toxic pursuits. Whatever the case, the yearning seems woven into the very fabric of our being.

In the Church, this theme of seeing God is central. Throughout Scripture, in the stories of people like Moses and Isaiah, Mary and Peter, we're reminded how an encounter with God both reveals God's nature and has the power to change lives.

Jesus invites us up the rugged mountain path to catch a glimpse of God. At times, like Peter, we won't get it. We'll become despondent. Fail to take up our cross. But the Transfiguration assures us that God invites us into a *lifelong* journey of transformation. In our hearts, our communities and congregations, and in the Church at large. It's a journey experienced not in a single moment, but throughout the arduous ascent, from the awe-inspiring view at the summit, in the sharp angles down the trail, from the barrenness of the valleys below.

Our challenge is, among the cracks and crevices of our humanity, in the places we feel most alienated, to see and reflect the glory of the Transfiguration in our lives and in the world. Despite our dusty, swollen feet, our heavy, aching muscles, our sweat and grime, to sit with the fatigue and pain as well as the joy, to allow God to open a door to the sacred that we might easily overlook. And to share that with a humanity that desperately needs to know there is more than what this world can offer—to allow our faces to shine like a lamp in the dark, our hearts to sing as the day dawns and the morning star rises.

The invitation is ours to accept. Enter into the glory of the Transfiguration: where what is broken can be made whole, what is isolated can be brought into community, what is hurting can be healed, through the brilliantly Divine light and love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.