



“For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world  
but forfeit their life?

“Or what will they give in return for their life?

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father,  
and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.

“Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death  
before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John  
and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun,  
and his clothes became dazzling white.

Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Then Peter said to Jesus,

“Lord, it is good for us to be here;  
if you wish, I will make three dwellings here,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking – suddenly – a bright cloud overshadowed them,  
and – from the cloud – a voice said,

“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased;  
listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this,  
they fell to the ground – and were overcome by fear.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

And – when they looked up,  
they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them,

“Tell no one about the vision –  
until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

**SECOND READING: II Peter 1:16-21**

*In our reading from the Second Letter of Peter,  
he places great weight on his being privileged  
to be among those present at the Transfiguration of the Lord.*

*And as he – personally – heard the voice of the “Majestic Glory,”  
he knew that the message he had conveyed was faithful and true.*

*Peter had also been a witness to the resurrection and the ascension.*

*There is no substitute for a personal experience of –  
and a personal relationship to – Jesus the Christ....*

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths –  
when we made known to you the power – and coming –  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
but 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."  
We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven,  
while we were with him on the holy mountain.  
So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed.  
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.  
First of all, you must understand this,  
that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation –  
because no prophecy ever came by human will –  
but men and women – moved by the Holy Spirit –  
spoke from God.

## SERMON

### "Times of Transformation"

A woman – looking down at the breathtaking – panoramic –  
view of Yosemite Valley from a high elevation – was overwhelmed.

*"I could die and go to heaven right now –  
and it wouldn't bother me a bit!"* – she exclaimed.

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So, *what* draws people to climb a mountain?

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There are as many answers to that question as there are climbers.  
See if any of these might connect with you:

- \* Some people like the challenge – and the sense of accomplishment –  
when they reach the summit.
- \* Others want to improve their physical fitness, strength, and endurance.
- \* Mountain climbing is good for emotional – and mental – health;  
helping people expand their horizons – and see the big picture.
- \* Climbing can be a great way to develop humility, patience, joy,  
confidence, and gratitude.
- \* You never know what you might learn from immersing yourself in nature –  
or, from people you meet on the trail.

- \* Hiking with others can strengthen relationships – and build team spirit.
- \* The view from the top can be awesome – and the beauty, exhilarating.
- \* And, some people find the experience helps them to commune with God.

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It's unlikely that any of these motives, except the last one —  
to commune with God —  
prompted Jesus to take three of his disciples —  
to head up the mountain —  
on the day mentioned in our text.

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And Luke – who also reports the **Transfiguration** –  
does say that **Jesus** went up on the mountain to pray.

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In any event – when they reached the pinnacle –  
**Jesus' appearance** was transformed –  
and his face shone like the sun – or a bolt of lightning –  
and his clothes, whiter than any bleach could bleach them.

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And so, this was – most definitely – a *time of transformation* for **Jesus!**

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According to the revered theologian – **Karl Barth** –  
what happened – on the **Mount of Transfiguration** –  
*was not* just an ordinary miracle.

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It is unique in that it was not *done by Jesus* – but *happened to Jesus*.

This miracle *did not* involve healing the sick, feeding the hungry,  
or raising the dead.

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So what did it accomplish?      What did it mean to **Jesus**?

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No long before this mountain hike,  
**Jesus** had told his disciples that he expected to suffer – and die –  
and then rise from the dead.

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**But they found such talk bewildering.**

They probably thought – perhaps, even, hoped –  
that **Jesus** would soon lead a movement –  
to overthrow their **Roman oppressors**.

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They – most likely – also wanted to know *what role they might have* –  
in his new administration.

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So they – then – advised him *not* to think about worst case scenarios,  
but to plan for victory.

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And consequently – just when Jesus needed friends –  
friends who would listen to his concerns –  
his closest followers just wanted him to stop all this talk –  
about sacrifice.

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But then **God** – as though sensing *how lonely* his **Son** must be feeling –  
sent **Moses** – and **Elijah** – to encourage him....  
as he approached the greatest test of his life.

And – in that encouraging context –  
**Luke** tells us that they spoke about **Jesus’ “exodus.”**

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That is – “his road out” – or his “departure” –  
an allusion to both his upcoming trip to **Jerusalem** –  
and *his departure* from this life.

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To accomplish **God’s purpose** – the *transformation of the human heart* –  
**Jesus** had to walk the path of *self-sacrifice*;  
as **Philippians 2:7** puts it – of *self-emptying*.

The way to resurrection was – *unavoidably* – through a cross.

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After discussing the suffering to come, it would not be surprising if –  
on some level –

**Jesus** had wished that **Moses** and **Elijah** could stay with him –  
to give him courage.

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Homiletics professor **Alyce McKenzie** wrote that –  
when she was *about to give birth* to her first child –  
she clung to a nurse's hand in panic:

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*“Give me back my hand now, honey,”* the nurse said – kindly but firmly.

*“My shift is over now. I’ve gotta go home.  
If one of us has to leave, it better be me.  
Because you’re the only one who can have this baby.”*

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Similarly – before **Moses** and **Elijah** left **Jesus** –  
you can imagine them saying something like that to **Jesus**:

*“Our shift is over. You’re the only one who can do this job.”*

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Returning to **Luke’s** use of the word “*exodus*” – and the presence of **Moses** –  
connects to **God’s epic deliverance** of the **Hebrew slaves** –  
from **Egypt**, through **Moses** –  
with the deliverance from sin **God** would accomplish –  
for all humanity – through **Jesus’ death and resurrection**.

Furthermore – seeing **Moses** and **Elijah** – *alive* –  
centuries after they lived on **Earth** –  
would have reminded **Jesus** that *death does not have the last word*.

Divine love is more powerful than death – as the **Song of Songs** declares:  
*“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”*

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Moving along, this time – on the mountaintop –  
was also a *time of transformation* for the **three disciples**.

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Seeing **Jesus** in his transformed appearance –  
together with **Moses** and **Elijah** –  
must *also have assured them* that there is – indeed – life after death.

Memories of that day would give them courage to face the trials to come.

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But – it is also true –  
that they *did not* immediately comprehend the vision they saw.

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Earlier, **Peter** had *correctly identified Jesus* as **God's messiah**.

But – nevertheless – **Peter** couldn't fathom the *path of suffering* –  
that the **Messiah** would travel – on the way to glory.

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For his part, **Jesus** had *begun to teach* his disciples.....  
that he would be rejected, and killed,  
and that those – who wanted to follow him –  
must take up their own crosses.

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Such language must have shocked – and confused – them.

Why would anyone want to follow a leader – who promised suffering?

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And – after many long days of helping countless hurting people –  
and a difficult climb up a high mountain –  
**Peter** – and his companions – *must have been exhausted*.

Again – according to Luke – the disciples *were overcome by sleep*....  
so – when **Jesus** appeared in brilliant glory –  
they *were not* fully awake.

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We can picture them rubbing their eyes,  
wondering whether they were dreaming?

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But – as we know from **Scripture** –  
uncertainty *never stopped Peter* from speaking.

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In the excitement of the moment,  
he suggested that they *set up three tents*:  
one for **Moses**, one for **Elijah**, and one for **Jesus**.

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Here, **Peter** was – most likely – thinking of the annual **Feast of Tabernacles** –  
which involved constructing temporary shelters –  
which they lived in for a week –  
to commemorate **God's presence** with them....  
while they *wandered in the wilderness*.

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Or – perhaps – **Peter** imagined enshrining the three leaders in perpetual glory.

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All that talk about suffering – and dying –  
must have felt like a momentary blip....  
in a potential plan *to usher in the messianic era*.

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This experience – of dazzling delight – was much more appealing.

Why not skip the pain – and jump straight to the gain?

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Indeed, who – among us – would not prefer to freeze such a moment.....  
the way the woman – surveying the glory of the **Yosemite Valley** –  
reveled in the ecstasy of her vision?

*Who would choose* to return to the *problems* of everyday life –  
and the *irritations* of troublesome people –  
if there was another option?

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But – the fact is – we cannot control, contain, or capture the **glory of God**;  
we can't preserve – or bottle up – **experiences with the Divine**.

Nor can we save one – for a rainy day –  
when we need a special sense of **God's presence**..

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*Furthermore, tabernacles or tents are – by definition – temporary structures*;  
they are not meant to be our permanent dwelling places.

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**Now – back to the Mount of Transfiguration:**

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There, **God** himself *bore witness* to **Jesus' identity** as his **beloved Son** –  
just as **God** had *testified at the beginning* of **Jesus' public ministry** –  
when **John** baptized **Jesus** in the **Jordan**.

*“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased;  
listen to him!”*

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Hearing **God** speak about **Jesus** – in this way – surely terrified the disciples.

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But Jesus did not belittle – or mock them – for their *very human reaction*.

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Instead, he came near – and touched them –  
encouraging them to get up – and not be afraid.

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And – when they looked up – they saw Jesus alone.....

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As **Peter** affirmed in our **Second Scripture Reading**,  
this was – most certainly –  
*a time of transformation* for **Jesus' three disciples!**

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**But – what about us?**

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*What* does the **Transfiguration** mean for us, today?

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Can it lead us to *a time for transformation*?

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**Ecclesiastes 3:7** tells us that there is  
*“a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”*

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And, the **Letter of James – 1:19** – confirms this:  
*“...let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak....”*

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Sometimes we are silent - when we should speak.

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But at other times – like **Peter** – we speak when we should be silent.

*How can we hear what Jesus wants to say to us –  
if we can't be still for five minutes?*

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**It is good for us to set aside time** – every day –  
when we *turn off* our devices,  
and *quiet our hearts* before the **Lord** –  
giving **God** space to speak to us.

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And – if the prospect of coming face to face, with the **Son of God** –  
causes a *bit of trepidation* –  
remember how **Jesus** responded to the **three disciples**.

Just as he *showed them compassion*,  
he *will not berate* our – understandable – timidity.

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Rather, **Jesus** will draw near to us – and touch us –  
inviting us to rise, and not be afraid.

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So, what if we opened ourselves up to the possibility that –  
seeing **Jesus**, and *intently listening to him* –  
might transform us?

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And what if – rather than *erecting a tabernacle* for **Jesus**, as **Peter** suggested –  
we realize that we were *created to be tabernacles* –  
in which **Jesus** resides –  
to show the world the **glory of God**?

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Our *full transformation* – of course –  
*will not* be complete until the **kingdom of God** comes in fulness.

But – as **Paul** wrote – in his **Second Letter to the Corinthians**: (3:18)  
*“all of us ... seeing the glory of the Lord ...  
are being transformed into the same image....  
from one degree of glory to another.”*

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Friends – when we invite **Jesus** to live within us –  
**God** begins our own – personal – transfiguration immediately.

And then – little by little – one step at a time –  
as we keep looking at **Jesus**, and *listening to him* –  
we will experience our own, personal,  
*times of transformation!*

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Indeed – to experience what **Paul** wrote – what **Paul** promised –  
to the **Colossians**:

*“Christ in you, the hope of glory!”* (1:27)

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**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.**

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### **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)**

*Adapted from the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)*

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, so greatly show the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave us without excuse; they do not give us that knowledge of God, and of God’s will, which is necessary for salvation.

Therefore it pleased the Lord, in a variety of times and ways, to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. Afterwards, to better preserve and spread the truth, and to more surely establish and comfort the church against all forms of weakness and spiritual attack, to commit the same wholly into writing. This makes our attention to Holy Scripture most necessary. Amen

### **CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

Their experience – on the Mount of Transfiguration –  
was a time of transformation –  
for both Jesus, and the three disciples.

And – when we heed God’s instruction: to listen to Jesus –  
we will experience times of transformation, as well!

As was said – regarding success at the Winter Olympics –  
“Every destination has a beginning!”

Let us receive the Lord’s benediction....