

**The Green Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, March 2, 2025**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Most just and merciful God, who transformed the face of Moses when he spoke to you on Mount Sinai, and who glorified and empowered your Chosen One, Jesus the Christ, on the Mount of Transfiguration: Reveal your glory in us as we attend to your Word this day, that we, too, might serve you faithfully on all the mountaintops – and in all the valleys – of our lives. Amen.

**FIRST SCRIPTURE READING**

**II Corinthians 3:12 - 4:1**

*Our first reading comes from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.*

*In it, Paul compares and contrasts Moses' glorification –*

*at the occasion of the giving of the Law, the 10 Commandments –  
and the greater glory of Jesus Christ.*

*And – from the results of that analysis –*

*Paul states the basis for the ministry of the followers of Christ....*

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness,  
not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel  
from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.  
But their minds were hardened.

Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant,  
that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside.

Indeed, to this very day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;  
but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.  
And all of us, with unveiled faces,  
seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror,  
are being transformed into the same image  
from one degree of glory to another;  
for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry,  
we do not lose heart.

The Word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God!**

**SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Luke 9:23-36**

**Pastor**

*Our second reading comes from the Gospel according to Luke.*

*In the verses just before our reading, the five thousand have been fed,  
Peter has made his declaration that Jesus is “The Messiah of God,”  
and Jesus has predicted his coming death, and resurrection....*

Then he [Jesus] said to them all,

“If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily  
and follow me.

“For those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

What does it profit them if they gain the whole world,  
but lose or forfeit themselves?

Those who are ashamed of me and of my words,  
of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory,  
and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

But truly I tell you, there are some standing here  
who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Now about eight days after these sayings,

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James,  
and went up on the mountain to pray.

And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed,  
and his clothes became dazzling white.

Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.

They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure,  
which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep;

but since they had stayed awake,  
they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus,

“Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —  
not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them;  
and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

Then from the cloud came a voice that said,  
“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”

When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

The Word of the Lord      **Thanks be to God!**

**SERMON**

“Jesus Alone!”

Rev. Dr. David E. Lovelace

Today’s scripture reading from **Luke’s Gospel** is *not for the faint of heart*.

Indeed, some might say that it is *not even for our times*.

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That is to say, **our era** is said to be one of *broad, open minds*,  
and – seemingly –  
*unlimited acceptance*.

And so it is that many people are certain:  
that the only thing they can be certain about  
is that there is – actually – nothing that they can be certain about!

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Today – as Steve noted – is **Transfiguration Sunday**.

And, this is one day in the **Church Year**  
that *has not been tamed* by our **secular culture**.

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Think – for example – about **Christmas**.

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Several years ago,  
a cartoonist pictured two men – walking by a church sign:  
it announced a **Christmas Eve service**.

And – one man comments –  
**“It’s getting so these religious people  
are trying to horn in everywhere.”**

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We smile – until we realize that millions of people in **America**  
now celebrate a *totally secular version* of **Christmas**.

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They *do not* think – even momentarily –  
of the **Christmas story** – which is the *sole basis* for the holiday.

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This – too – is the case with what has become  
one of our culture’s *major shopping events*:  
**Halloween** –  
with all of its *costumes*, and *parties*.

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There, the **secularization** is virtually total:

Very few people know that **Halloween** – **October 31<sup>st</sup>** – is “*hallowed*,”  
*only because* it is the **evening** before **All Saints Day** –  
the day when **Christians** honor the *unknown saints*.

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But – *far worse* – some earnest **Christians**  
have come to look upon **Halloween** as not only *secular*,  
but – actually – *evil*.

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And, so it is that **Jesus** has been *crowded out* of days *and* celebrations –  
days and celebrations that both originally *honored his name*,  
and, which provided important *occasions for worship*.

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But – notably – this conflict is *nothing new*.

That is, the *same basic issue* was present  
when **Jesus** was here in the flesh.

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And, this is the issue in this morning’s **Gospel Reading** –  
which we have come to know as the **Transfiguration of the Lord**.

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As we come to this reading, the *time* –  
for the completion of **Jesus’ earthly ministry**, –  
is *drawing near*.

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We know that this is true because –  
very soon, in this *same chapter* of **Luke’s Gospel** –  
we read that “**Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem....**” (v. 51)

And – for this very reason – **Jesus** sought to *prepare his three key disciples* –  
**Peter, James, and John** – for their *future ministry*.

**These three** seem to have been the *most spiritually sensitive* of the **Twelve**.

That is – when there were *special occasions* concerning the faith –  
it was to *these three* that **Jesus** turned.

Indeed, on this particular occasion – **Jesus** asked *this very three* to join him.

Here, a brief aside:

On many occasions, the gospel writers – **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John** –  
*do not* explicitly connect **Jesus’ teaching**  
with *what is happening*.

That is to say, with the *context in which* a particular teaching takes place.

Sometimes, of course, *the connection is obvious*,  
and **Jesus’ teaching** is derived from – or based on –  
the *circumstances* themselves.

But – in many other cases – his teaching seems to *stand alone*.

That reality makes it notable that – *in this specific instance* –  
**Luke** *makes a point* of detailing the **circumstances**.

About eight days had passed – **Luke** says –  
since **Jesus** had made a *startling prediction*.

That is, **Jesus** had said that there were some people – (Luke 9:26-27)  
*present that very day* –  
who *would not taste death* until they *had seen* the **kingdom of God**.

And – in that *same conversation* –  
**Jesus** had said that *people would be judged*  
on the basis of *their loyalty to him*.

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Then – *with all of that* in the background –  
**Jesus** asked **Peter, James, and John** to go with him,  
up *on the mountain – to pray*.

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And as **Jesus** prayed – **Luke** tells us – a *spectacular thing* happened;  
or – to use a common phrase –  
something quite **“out of this world:”**

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**Jesus’ face** changed before their eyes,  
and his **clothing** became *dazzling white*.

And then, two men – **Moses** and **Elijah** – were seen,  
talking with **Jesus** about his **“departure,”**  
which **“he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”**

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We *are not* given any additional details....

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But – in describing the **“meanwhile”** – **Luke** uses *some puzzling words*:

**“Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep;  
but since they had stayed awake,  
they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.”**

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That description seems *more than a little* contradictory!

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**Here, Jill Duffield** – the former editor of The Presbyterian Outlook –  
makes some interesting observations.

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She writes:

“I think **Luke** may be saying that **Peter** and **James** and **John**  
weren’t burdened so much by [what we call] sleep.

“I think they, *like all of us* prior to **Jesus’ glorification**,  
are *weighed down by death*.

“I think **Luke** *wants us to connect* their **oppressive sleepiness**  
with the **burden of sin and death** –  
that *can only be lifted* by what **Jesus** will accomplish in **Jerusalem**.

“I think the disciples aren't *sleepy* so much as *bone tired*.  
Beaten down.  
Exhausted.

“Fighting not just sleep,  
but the despair and death that were pervasive in their time –  
(and – I would add – are no less pervasive in our own).

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“By this point in **Luke's Gospel**,  
they have been *up close and personal* with **lepers**,  
the **demon possessed**,  
and a **massive crowd** of hungry people.

“They have *gone toe-to-toe* with **Pharisees**,  
heard that **Herod** is *asking questions*,  
and know that the *one who first proclaimed Jesus* –  
**John the Baptist** – has *been beheaded*.

“They've *almost drowned* at sea,  
and – *now* – [they] have just been informed  
that the **One** they *left everything in order to follow*  
will undergo **great suffering** – and **rejection**.

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“Oh – *and by the way* – they need to **deny themselves**,  
**take up their crosses**, and **follow**.

“And, yes, *they've gone out*, and *preached*, and *healed* –  
but the **needs** are great, the **accomplishments** few,  
and the **suffering** – and the **death** – are never ending....

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“And **Luke** knows that *they ain't seen nothing* yet:  
**Luke** knows *they will fall asleep* in the **Garden of Gethsemane** –  
precisely when **Jesus** *needs them the most*.”  
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**And so it is in our time:**

Speaking *before the advent* of **COVID** – perhaps prophetically –  
**Jill Duffield** continues:

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“We keep filling up the food bins, but they keep emptying.

“We start cleaning up after the floods, and the record blizzard hits.

“Things settle down in one part of the world, but another is exploding.

“We reconcile with one family member, and – darn it –  
if we aren't now at odds with another.

“The credit card gets paid off – and the furnace goes out.

“Our children seem happy – and in a good place –  
but – now – our parent's health is failing.

“We are following Jesus the best we can –  
visiting the sick, feeding the hungry –  
and yet there is always more to do.

“And we are so tired, so stretched,  
fighting not to give in to a death-like sleep,  
a sleep that renders us blind to **Jesus' glory**,  
and deaf to his **Word**....

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“So maybe that's why – **Luke** wants to tell us –  
Stay awake, stay fully awake,  
because this glimpse of glory is going to get you through....

“But *how*? When *we* are so bone tired?  
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“Maybe **Luke** *offers us a clue* here, too.  
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“Listen to **Matthew's version**:

*‘Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James  
and his brother John and led them up a high mountain....’*  
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“Now, listen to **Mark's version**:

*‘Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John,  
and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves....’*

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“Now listen [again] to **Luke's account**:

*‘Now about eight days after these sayings,  
Jesus took with him Peter and John and James  
and went up on the mountain to pray....’*

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“Notice *anything different* about **Luke's version**???

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“**Luke** says *eight days* later,  
a reference to the **day of resurrection**,  
the *eighth day*,  
the *first day* of the **new creation**,  
a reminder that death *does not* have the last word.

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“**Luke** wants to connect this **Transfiguration story** –  
*not just* to **Jesus' baptism** – when God also spoke –  
but – also – to his **death and resurrection**.

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“**[Luke]** desperately *wants us to get it*,  
*who Jesus* is,  
*how hard* it is to follow,  
*how powerful* the **forces of sin and death** [are] –  
but – also – *how sure* **Christ's victory** is.....  
so stay awake during *those very times*  
*that make us most bone tired*.

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“Did you notice *anything else unique* in **Luke**?

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“**Jesus prays**.

“He goes up the mountain to pray and – *while praying* –  
*he changes, his face changes,*  
*his clothes become dazzling white*.

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“**Jesus** [was also] *praying at his baptism* – when the *heavens opened up*.

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“Before he preaches, *he prays*.

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“He *prays all night* before choosing **the twelve**.

“And *he will pray* just before his arrest,  
**‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me;  
yet not my will but yours be done.’**

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“Maybe **Luke** wants to *tell us something*  
about the *power of Jesus' prayer*,  
[and] – therefore – about the *power of our prayers* –  
made in **Jesus' name**.

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[So] “Perhaps the *best way to fight sleep* –  
to remember that sin and death *don't win* in the end,  
to *remain awake and ready* to see **God's glory** –  
is to **pray**,  
and to **listen** to [**Jesus**] as we've been commanded.

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**Well, back to the mountaintop....**

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**Peter, James, and John** have seen **Jesus** transfigured,  
and in the company of **Moses** and **Elijah**.

And – his *senses overwhelmed* – **Peter** makes –  
*what seems to him* – a logical response:

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He suggests that they *erect three tents* –  
one for **Moses**, one for **Elijah**, and one for **Jesus**.

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Now – from where you and I sit –  
**Peter** had *good reason* to be rather *pleased with himself*.

After all, he has just seen **Jesus** in the company of **Moses** –  
the representative of the **Law**,  
and **Elijah** – the epitome of the **prophets**.

That is, [together] *they embodied* the **Hebrew Scriptures**,  
“*the Law, and the Prophets.*”

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And so – in *his proposal* – **Peter** was putting **Jesus**  
*on a par* with these *exemplary representatives* of **Israel’s history**.

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But – if we think more deeply about it –  
*this is not a compliment*,  
but – rather – a very human **demotion!**

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Indeed, **Peter** was *effectively denying* his own dramatic **declaration of faith** –  
made only *eight days* earlier –  
when he announced that **Jesus** was the *Messiah*,  
the very **Son of God**.

But now – in *his proposal* –  
**Peter** was placing **Jesus** *on the same level* as **Moses** and **Elijah**.

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The reality is that **Peter** was facing the *very same problem* with **Jesus**  
that **humankind** has *subsequently faced* –  
down through the all the centuries:

That is, **Peter** was trying to *find a comparison* for **Jesus**,  
in order to try to *better to understand* him.

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But, at the very moment when **Peter** was trying to find a place for **Jesus** –  
a place where he could *understand him by comparison* –  
*a cloud descended* from heaven.

And, a **voice** came from the cloud –  
obviously the **voice of God** –  
telling the three disciples that **Jesus** was **God’s Son**,  
**God’s Chosen One**,  
and that *they should listen to him*.

Then – when the voice had spoken – **Jesus** was *found alone*.

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But *don't we also struggle* to identify **Jesus**?

Don't we – too – want a *basis of comparison*.

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But – the fact is – *there is none*;  
    **Moses** and **Elijah** disappear,  
    and **Jesus** *stands alone*.

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Indeed – as **Jill Duffield** suggested –  
    what happened at the **Transfiguration**  
    *was a foretaste* of the **Resurrection**.

In **Jesus**, we are dealing with someone *altogether different*,  
    someone totally *beyond comparison*.

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Indeed, *in every respect*, **Jesus** stands alone!

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But nevertheless – as we noted – this **identity crisis** has *repeatedly arisen*.

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*Century after century* – beginning with the **Resurrection**,  
    and continuing through the spread of the **Gospel**,  
    from **Jerusalem** to **Judea** and **Samaria**,  
    to **Rome**, and on up into **Europe**,  
    even to the **British Isles**,  
    and then across the ocean – to the new world of the **Americas** –  
    wherever the **Word** goes,  
    there are *attempts at comparisons*.

And – always – the **ultimate truth** *cannot* be denied:  
    *there is no other* like **him**.

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But – nevertheless – we are still struggling with this,  
    as have people in *every generation*:

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We *want* to follow **Jesus**,  
but we also want to *make him manageable*.

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We want him as our *teacher*, our *example*,  
and – if possible – one who seems to *support our causes*.

That is, our **politics**, our **economics**, and our **sociology**.

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We want to fence **Jesus** in by our *human standards*,  
so that we can have a *basis for comparison*.

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**But there are none. Jesus stands alone.**

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Friends, this is **God's word** for us on **Transfiguration Day**:  
All else, eventually– *but always*, recedes from the scene.....  
and *we are left* with **Jesus** alone.

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So may we – even as **Luke** writes in his **Gospel** –  
*listen to him*,  
and – then – *live our lives to his glory!*

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

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

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

**In the gospel God declares his love for the world, and his desire that all should be saved; reveals fully and clearly the only way of salvation; promises eternal life to all who truly repent and believe in Christ; invites and commands all to embrace the offered mercy; and by the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word pleads with us to accept his gracious invitation.**

**It is the duty and privilege of everyone who hears the gospel to immediately accept its merciful provisions. Since there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the gospel, and since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, Christ has commissioned his church to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations.**

**All believers are, therefore, under obligation to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth.**

## CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

After Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured,  
Luke tells us that *they told no one* what they had seen.

Today, we, too, have enjoyed the presence of our Lord –  
as we have joined our hearts in prayer and praise;  
and, as we have gathered at Christ's Table;  
now – with great joy – may we share the good news!

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