

Year A – Transfiguration– February 15, 2026
Pastor Megan Floyd
Exodus 24:12-18
Matthew 17:1-9

Grace and peace to you from God and the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, who reveals to us God's glory. Amen.

In 2012, I had the privilege of leading my congregation's youth group to the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans.

The week was filled with joys and challenges, and stories that still make me laugh. But one of the most incredible, mountain-top experiences I had there... was a story of divine encounter... a story of being washed over by the Holy Spirit.

It was the night of closing worship, so all of the more than 33,000 participants were gathered in the Superdome to sing and praise God, to listen to inspiring speakers, and to hear the word of God proclaimed.

We worshipped each night we gathered, but this one was special... It was special because during the closing worship, we would share holy communion together... as one church... 33,000+ members... *one* body of Christ.

I don't know if you've ever been inside the Superdome in New Orleans, but it is very steep, so there's really not a bad seat in the house, so long as you don't mind heights.

My youth wanted to sit at the very top of the arena for this worship experience, so we made our way up the mountain of levels and escalators and found some seats where we could take in the entire scene below.

Once we settled in, we were treated to an incredible view... a view of the church... thousands of teenagers and their adult leaders sat below, all eager to begin worship.

The excitement and the buzz were intoxicating... as we watched the tiny people way down on the floor bring us together in song and worship.

Now you would think that communing over 33,000 people would take all day, but... the organizers have this down to a science, and it actually runs quite smoothly and quickly.

Given our location, we watched below as people moved to receive the elements, and then to be anointed... they all received a cross of oil on their foreheads to remind each and every person that they were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

I watched this all take place, and at some point, our group moved to receive the elements as well, and to be anointed with oil... and then we sat back down to wait while the rest were served.

And as I sat, I recall feeling a shift in the air... almost like a fullness surrounding me... as when a heavy fog rolls in and you can sense the weight of the space around you.

I recall feeling this shift in the air begin at my feet, and then start moving up my legs... I could feel the new air rising, until it suddenly washed up and over my head, and... I just wept.

I felt so completely surrounded by the Spirit... so completely held... claimed... and loved... so completely assured of God's faithful presence.

It was remarkable... and it is an experience that has stayed with me for all these years. I know... that it changed my relationship with God to one that was no longer distant, but now... more personal... close.

We call these kinds of moments... these encounters... mountain-top moments... moments of encountering God... moments of profound closeness with our Creator and source of everlasting love.

And of course, we call them mountain-top moments... because in scripture, God's people often seem to meet God on the mountain... as with Moses in our reading from Exodus... and, of course, the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Encountering God's full glory is disarming... scary even... and can leave us unsure of exactly how to respond. For me... it left me weeping, which really alarmed the youth.

Peter, James, and John head up the mountain with Jesus, and are witnesses to a dazzling display and blinding light... and Moses and Elijah, together with Jesus...

And Peter... sweet Peter... he thinks this is great, and offers to set up tents for them... he assumes this is a moment they'll dwell in for some time. We can hardly blame him.

And then the voice from God thunders out... with the words we heard at Jesus' baptism.

"This is my son, the beloved... with whom I am well pleased..." ...but then God adds... Listen to him. Listen.

Peter... man... stop talking and take in the moment... just absorb the light of God for a second... let it change you... let it alter your understanding of who this Jesus really is.

I understand Peter's desire to stay in that moment... I really do... it's normal. But we don't live on the mountain... we don't get to spend all our time in those incredible moments of clarity with God.

We can, and should, bask in the glory of God's light when it is there, but we can't stay there all the time... life continues... and so... warmed from the light of those experiences, we keep moving...

And yes, of course, we allow our mountain-top experiences to transform us, to shape our hearts, but then we make our way back down the mountain, to live our lives of faith in the day-to-day.

I've asked Raymond to share this photo with you... Last week, I was at a preaching retreat in a little place near Phoenix, and on the property, there was this massive labyrinth.

My colleagues and I joked that walking a labyrinth is to intentionally take the most inefficient path toward a destination... but I suppose that's only if you consider the center to be a destination, and not simply part of the journey.

I spent some time praying my way through the labyrinth and marveling at how each turn gave me a new perspective on my surroundings... pointing me toward new plants and new views... how each path brought me toward a new understanding of the landscape.

In the background, though... was this mountain, with the sun shining so incredibly brightly over it. It felt so present and so close... like I could reach out and touch it... even though it was in the distance... it was an ever-present backdrop for the whole weekend.

As I worked my way around the labyrinth, I was sometimes facing away from the light of the sun and from the mountain, but then I would follow the curve of the path and turn a corner... and suddenly the sun would be shining in my face, blinding me...

and I would continue walking and soaking in the warmth of the light... and the glory of the mountain, and I felt so incredibly close to God.

Peter faced this bright light around Jesus, on the mountain... and he wanted to stay there. We can hardly blame him.

Leading up to that moment, they had been climbing through Jesus' liberating ministry of teaching and healing... it was all so amazing... and then Jesus hits them with the shocking revelation that he must suffer and die.

...and that any who want to become his followers must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. They must be prepared to lose their life for his sake... in order to save it.

So yes... I understand why Peter wanted to stay in that glorious moment, soaking in the light and warmth... he was not ready to face the ashes and sorrow that awaited them as they turned toward Jerusalem and the cross.

Are any of us ever really ready for that?

And yet, they must descend... but that is the blessing of this life of faith... we get to carry God's light forward... we get to experience these moments of encounter... of revelation... these mountain-top moments... and carry them out into the world around us.

Remember, you are the light of the world... and it is the light of God's glory with which you shine.

This is what it means to walk with Jesus... to walk in the highs and lows and of this life of faith... we have these moments of profound encounter... like at the Superdome in New Orleans... and like this labyrinth at the foot of the mountain... these moments fill us with God's Holy Spirit and shape our lives around God's glory.

They help us remember who we are and whose we are... and remind us that we are claimed and redeemed through grace and mercy... and they give us strength for the journey, when the journey takes us through ashes and sorrow.

When we find ourselves walking through the shadow of death, these moments help us to keep walking... keep walking... because on the other side is resurrection and new life.

And to stay on the mountain... would mean to miss out on all the ways that God continues to show up.

If we only ever lived for the grand, mountain-top moments... we would miss all the ways that God reveals God's self to us in *small* ways... the everyday, ordinary ways.

So, we must remember... that mountain-top encounters with God are amazing... awe-inspiring... but we don't need to stay on the mountain...

because the promise of transfiguration is that the glory of God transforms every corner of our whole world... and us... along with it, everyday... and always. Amen.