



Transfiguration Sunday
15 February 2026

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Today is Transfiguration Sunday. Today is also World Whale Day. National Gumdrops Day. I want Butterscotch Day. World Hippo Day. National Wisconsin Day. And if you forgot your Valentine; bought the wrong chocolates; ignored your significant other; burnt the dinner; showed up late; or committed some other heinous offense on the sacred day of love according to Catholic tradition and Hallmark. Have no fear because today is also “Love Reset Day.” Which seems only fitting after celebrating Valentine’s Day just yesterday. I wonder was your yesterday a moment on the mountaintop or a descent into the valley of the shadow of death. Which is also okay since today is also celebrated as – Single Awareness Day. Just so you know – we’ve got you covered in all of your glory – be it valley low or mountain high.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

I always appreciate another version of the story. ¹⁻³ Six days later, three of them saw that glory. Jesus took Peter and the brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. Sunlight poured from his face. His clothes were filled with light. Then they realized that Moses and Elijah were also there in deep conversation with him. ⁴ Peter broke in, “Master, this is a great moment! What would you think if I built three memorials here on the mountain—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah?” ⁵ While he was going on like this, babbling, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and sounding from deep in the cloud a voice: “This is my Son, marked by my love, focus of my delight. Listen to him.” ⁶⁻⁸ When the disciples heard it, they fell flat on their faces, scared to death. But Jesus came over and touched them. “Don’t be afraid.” When they opened their eyes and looked around all they saw was Jesus, only Jesus. ⁹ Coming down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy. “Don’t breathe a word of what you’ve seen. After the Son of Man is raised from the dead, you are free to talk.”

It is somewhat impossible to believe that Peter, James, and John said nothing after this moment on the mountaintop. “Jesus – can you believe it? How lucky we are? To see Moses! Elijah! To hear the voice of God! Now, we know that you are the Son of God, the Messiah! We have to tell the others. So much to tell. Now everyone will believe!” And just as you are about to set off down the mountain – Jesus taps you on the shoulder, “so I need you to keep this to yourself, you can’t tell anyone what you saw until after the Son of Man rises from the dead.” Wait? What? And you look at the other disciples because you know you heard Jesus wrong, but their faces reflect your own shock and confusion. And all of a sudden, this mountaintop moment feels a little more like a valley of violation. But still, you follow Jesus down the mountain, unsure of what is next. This is the life we live – mountaintops and valleys – and in-between? Uncertainty and conviction – depending on what the day may bring.

We always hear this story of “Jesus shining like the sun” right before the dusty remnants of burnt palm branches cross our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. “Sunlight poured from his face,” seems to me to be the very mountaintop of the season of Epiphany. We waited for the light in Advent. We celebrated the presence of the light at Christmas. Epiphany invited us to live in the light. Today the light shines so brightly around us that we cannot help but shield our eyes, and it seems as disciples, our only response is to bow down to the ground in worship overwhelmed by the light. The light we have hoped for, prayed for, waited for, knelt before, and now – stand surrounded albeit somewhat bewildered by such light.

I know the story. The place: Mount Hermon – high enough for all of Israel to see – some 11,000 feet high. The main characters: Jesus. Peter. James. John. Add in the supporting characters: Moses and Elijah. Get the Lighting tech to stir in the voice of God the Father. And then hire a lighting designer who can astonish everything with bright light. Then even this mountaintop becomes a valley for the glimpse of the glory of God



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we have seen. This season of light has been leading us to this mountain. And when God pulls back the curtain of heaven, we are so awestruck by the glory that we cannot be certain what we have seen with our own eyes is actually true. This is the life we live – uncertainty and conviction – depending on what the day may bring.

And what does this day bring. It is the uncertainty of our own protection and freedom to stand in the streets of our own country. It is the conviction that God calls us to walk alongside people targeted for all of our problems – a group of people that changes depending on who we are told to be afraid of – but always, in common, is there differences from my own. It is the uncertainty of division. It is the conviction of community – which our Savior calls us to live into. It is the uncertainty of hatred. It is the conviction of love – which our Savior shows to each of us, the stranger, our enemies. It is the uncertainty of war. It is the conviction of peace – which our Savior calls us to. It is the uncertainty of power by force. It is the conviction of authority by vulnerability – which our Savior teaches us from the cross. It is the uncertainty of deception. It is the conviction of truth – which our Savior reminds us – will set us free. This is the life we live, not dependent on what the day may bring – but dependent on God’s call to follow. Whether we climb the mountain or fall into the valley – Jesus goes before us. And we have so much to say since Jesus has, indeed, risen from the dead. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

So this is where we are. This life we live. Today – on the mountaintop. And tomorrow – well, wherever the Savior sends us.

Believe me I know how tempting it is to remain inside this blessing, to linger where everything is dazzling and clear. We could build walls around this blessing, put a roof over it. We could bring in a table, chairs, have the most amazing meals. We could make a home. We could stay. But this blessing is built for leaving, this blessing is made for coming down the mountain. This blessing wants to be in motion to travel with you as you return to level ground. It will seem strange how quiet this blessing becomes when it returns to earth. It is not shy. It is not afraid. It simply knows how to bide its time, to watch and wait, to discern and pray until the moment comes when it will reveal everything it knows, when it will shine forth with all it has seen, when it will dazzle with the unforgettable light you have carried all this way.

My friends, it’s time to go. Amen.