



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

August 9, 2026

Every day at 5 pm, the East Hampton lifeguards stand up in the chairs and blow their whistles. For them the day is over and it's time to clean up and go home. Many people on the beach follow their example and do the same thing. That's a shame because 5:00 is about the time that the light is at its best. When Shari and I were thinking of moving here, the first thing many people told us was about the light. Artists have long known that the light on the East End of Long Island – and in East Hampton – is particularly special, particularly beautiful, and particularly clear. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the God-light of early evening at the beach. On a clear day you can see forever, with the deep blue sky and sea interrupted only by a wave or a bird, or if you are lucky, the fin of a dolphin or a whale. Of course, it's not always like that. Sometimes it's cloudy and the sky and the water are gray. Sometimes it's foggy or stormy and you can't see more than a few feet in front of your face. Sometimes, it's so cold or hot or windy that you don't even want to look. Sometimes, however, it's just right. Those goldilocks, bluebird moments – and there have been several on the beach this week – are magnificent, awesome in the true meaning of that word. It is unfortunate when guests come for a weekend and don't have good views. It's a good thing that we have the aforementioned artists to show them – and us – what is really there.

Our faith can be little like that. Most of the time, our sense of God is a little foggy, greyed out, and hard to see through the storms of life and the buffeting of winds of distraction and emotions hot and cold. In times like those, I am comforted by the lives of Saints who had amazing faith and did amazing things but only actually experienced God a handful of times in their lives. This morning's gospel describes a mountain-top experience. Most of my personal mountain top experiences have been like the times I reached the Knife Edge of Katahdin in Maine or the top of Half Dome in Yosemite. At those moments, I didn't find God or experience oneness with the universe. Instead of victory, I experienced vertigo, shaky knees, and an overwhelming desire to go back down. That said, I have had mountain-top experiences (some at sea level!) in which the presence of God was profoundly clear and everything made sense. Those experiences have sustained me through incredible ups and downs, highs and lows. Those experiences are very much why I became a priest and still am one today.

In today's text we heard the story of Peter, James and John going with Jesus up a mountain and how Jesus was transfigured when they reached the top. I'm not sure if Jesus changed or their ability to see him changed. Whatever happened, they were able to see who he really was. They were able to see that he was who they thought he was, who their hearts had said he was. They were able to see that Jesus was everything they were looking and hoping for: the fulfillment of the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah). Perhaps for the first time, they heard God repeating the words given at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved son." At that moment, everything made sense. At that moment, they knew who Jesus was. At that moment, they knew who they were as well.

Unfortunately, when it comes to Mountain-top experiences, we are more like Moses than Jesus. Moses is one of the great biblical heroes. Moses was also very human. When God called him from the burning bush, his first response was no. In battle, he needed help from others to hold his hands up. (see Exodus 17:12-14). In the wilderness he endured constant complaining from those who looked back to better times that probably didn't actually exist (see Number 11:1-25) and was nearly abandoned by people who put their trust in a golden calf – or a bull market – rather than God. (see Exodus 32) Perhaps because of this, Moses kept his defensive shields up and put a veil over his face, hiding his light from anyone but God. That's our first reading. In our second reading, Peter took a different approach.

Today we meet Peter as an older man, writing about this moment, making sure that the light he experienced is shared. To his readers, he says, "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." For Peter the transfiguration was one of those moments of light, of clarity, not just about who Jesus was but about who his followers are called to be as well. Like us, Peter was far from perfect. Peter had the courage to be himself, to be authentic, and let his light shine anyway. Like Moses, many of us hide our light—and our true selves—behind protective shields. Peter challenges us to let those down, let others see us as God sees us, and let God's light shine through.

In the gospels, the Transfiguration happens just before Jesus and the disciples start their journey to Jerusalem. This is the last time the disciples would have with Jesus before he would be put on trial, condemned to death, and die. For the disciples, it will feel like everything they believed and worked for was falling apart. Their remembrance of the mount of Transfiguration, like our weekly remembrance in communion, would sustain them through it all.

So what about you? Have you had a moment of clarity, a moment when the God-light helped you see forever, and everything made sense? If you have, your challenge is share that story with others. If you haven't, your challenge is to seek the artist, the musician, the poet or storyteller who has – and ask them to show what is already and always has been there. When Peter, James and John went up on the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. In that moment, they knew who he was - and who they were as well. May what happened to them also happen to you.