



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

February 15, 2026; Last Epiphany A

[Isaiah 58:1-12](#), [1 Corinthians 2:1-16](#), [Matthew 5:13-20](#)

Yesterday was Valentine's Day. But who was Valentine? Tradition says that Saint Valentine may have been a priest who lived in Rome during the time of Claudius who was martyred on February 14 because he performed weddings for soldiers who were forbidden to marry and because he ministered to Christians, who were persecuted at that time. According to legend, during his imprisonment, he healed the jailer's daughter and before his execution wrote her a letter signed "Your Valentine" as a farewell.

I know it is the middle of the cold of winter but in the church world, wedding season is just around the corner and things are heating up. I'm not just talking about Ice Dancing in the Olympics or the wedding in the Superbowl Halftime Show. I am in the middle of counseling three different couples for summer weddings and in my family circle, my daughter's wedding plans are gathering steam. The first time I meet with a couple, we spend time walking through the marriage service, paying close attention to the wedding vows. I am very aware that, especially if they are young and have not been married before, the people in front of me have no idea what those vows really mean. They have no idea what for better or worse could actually entail, the toll of financial stress – for richer or poorer – can take on a relationship, how emotionally and physically exhausting it will be to care for one another in sickness and health, and how the pain of grief and loss will remain with them long after they are parted by death. The truth is that love – or what our culture thinks of love – is blind. When we fall in love, hormones and evolutionary biology have a way of short-circuiting our brains. It's not that falling in love is bad. It is the most wonderful of things. It, however, doesn't last forever. Psychologist Harville Hendrix suggests that to truly fall in love we need to fall out of love. It is when the initial zing starts to fade and we begin to discover who our partner really is and who we really are – that real love begins. In her book on "Women on the Move," Gretchen Janssen describes the stages people go through when moving to a new culture, or starting a new job, or starting a new relationship. First there is a honeymoon stage when everything is wonderful. Then there is a stage of what she calls "subtle irritations" which is followed by a stage of "complete frustration and depression." This is followed by a time of coping, which leads to the final stage of "belonging." You have to go through the stages of adaptation just like you have to go through the stages of grief.

Like grief, if you are just in the beginning and think you're there, you are in that stage of denial. Can you see how Janssen's stages of cross-cultural adaptation describe the developmental stages of marriage – or any long-term relationship? Can you see how they might describe your spiritual journey, your relationship with Jesus, and/or your relationship with God?

This morning's gospel tells us the story of Jesus and Peter, James and John on the Mount of the Transfiguration. The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. The first couple of years were heady, emotionally filled, exciting times. This was followed by some moments when the disciples struggled with skepticism and doubt, when they were tired and worn out from the journey, and when they found themselves locked in competition with one another for which one of them was the greatest. It wasn't until they went away on the Mount of the Transfiguration that their eyes were opened, and they could see that Jesus was far more than the guy who they liked to have deep conversations with around a campfire in the desert or hang out with on the beach by the Sea of Galilee. It took that time on the Mount of the Transfiguration for them to understand that Jesus was more than a teacher, a healer, or philosopher and a friend. It took that time on the Mount of the Transfiguration for them to realize that Jesus embodied all of the law and traditions of Moses and all of the power and vision of the prophets. It took that time on the Mount of the Transfiguration for them to realize who Jesus was... and to fall in love again, this time with the real person, to realize that he loved them, complications and all, and in the process realize that they could love and accept themselves in the same way.

The Bible tells us that the moment Jesus came down off the mountain, his face was set toward Jerusalem. The clarity of the Transfiguration would sustain the disciples through everything that would come – the triumphal entry, the turning over the tables in the Temple, the last supper, the betrayal, the trial, the crucifixion and the tomb. The Transfiguration is given to us to sustain us through the forty days of Lent, through Holy Week and Good Friday and to Easter and beyond. Like the disciples, we can go through better and worse, richer and poorer, sickness and health, life and death with Jesus, because we have come to know and love who Jesus really is - and know that he knows and loves us as we really are as well.

Saint Valentine was killed because he performed weddings even though he knew it was illegal to do so. For Valentine, love was the most important thing. This Valentine message was picked up by Chaucer, by Shakespeare, and of course Hallmark. May it also be picked up by you and me.